ГЕРБЕРТ УЭЛЛС

WHAT IS COMING? A FORECAST OF THINGS AFTER THE WAR

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Содержание

H. G. Wells
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I. FORECASTING THE FUTURE

Prophecy may vary between being an intellectual amusement and a serious occupation; serious not only in its intentions, but in its consequences. For it is the lot of prophets who frighten or disappoint to be stoned. But for some of us moderns, who have been touched with the spirit of science, prophesying is almost a habit of mind.

Science is very largely analysis aimed at forecasting. The test of any scientific law is our verification of its anticipations. The scientific training develops the idea that whatever is going to happen is really here now-if only one could see it. And when one is taken by surprise the tendency is not to say with the untrained man, "Now, who'd ha' thought it?" but "Now, what was it we overlooked?"

Everything that has ever existed or that will ever exist is here-for anyone who has eyes to see. But some of it demands eyes of superhuman penetration. Some of it is patent; we are almost as certain of next Christmas and the tides of the year 1960 and the

death before 3000 A.D. of everybody now alive as if these things had already happened. Below that level of certainty, but still at a very high level of certainty, there are such things as that men will probably be making aeroplanes of an improved pattern in 1950, or that there will be a through railway connection between Constantinople and Bombay and between Baku and Bombay in the next half-century. From such grades of certainty as this, one may come down the scale until the most obscure mystery of all is reached: the mystery of the individual. Will England presently produce a military genius? or what will Mr. Belloc say the day after to-morrow? The most accessible field for the prophet is the heavens; the least is the secret of the jumping cat within the human skull. How will so-and-so behave, and how will the nation take it? For such questions as that we need the subtlest guesses of all.

Yet, even to such questions as these the sharp, observant man may risk an answer with something rather better than an even chance of being right.

The present writer is a prophet by use and wont. He is more interested in to-morrow than he is in to-day, and the past is just material for future guessing. "Think of the men who have walked here!" said a tourist in the Roman Coliseum. It was a Futurist mind that answered: "Think of the men who will." It is surely as interesting that presently some founder of the World Republic, some obstinate opponent of militarism or legalism, or the man who will first release atomic energy for human use, will walk

along the Via Sacra as that Cicero or Giordano Bruno or Shelley have walked there in the past. To the prophetic mind all history is and will continue to be a prelude. The prophetic type will steadfastly refuse to see the world as a museum; it will insist that here is a stage set for a drama that perpetually begins.

Now this forecasting disposition has led the writer not only to publish a book of deliberate prophesying, called "Anticipations," but almost without premeditation to scatter a number of more or less obvious prophecies through his other books. From first to last he has been writing for twenty years, so that it is possible to check a certain proportion of these anticipations by the things that have happened, Some of these shots have hit remarkably close to the bull's-eye of reality; there are a number of inners and outers, and some clean misses. Much that he wrote about in anticipation is now established commonplace. In 1894 there were still plenty of sceptics of the possibility either of automobiles or aeroplanes; it was not until 1898 that Mr. S.P. Langley (of the Smithsonian Institute) could send the writer a photograph of a heavier-than-air flying machine actually in the air. There were articles in the monthly magazines of those days *proving* that flying was impossible.

One of the writer's luckiest shots was a description (in "Anticipations" in 1900) of trench warfare, and of a deadlock almost exactly upon the lines of the situation after the battle of the Marne. And he was fortunate (in the same work) in his estimate of the limitations of submarines. He anticipated Sir

Percy Scott by a year in his doubts of the decisive value of great battleships (*see* "An Englishman Looks at the World"); and he was sound in denying the decadence of France; in doubting (before the Russo-Japanese struggle) the greatness of the power of Russia, which was still in those days a British bogey; in making Belgium the battle-ground in a coming struggle between the mid-European Powers and the rest of Europe; and (he believes) in foretelling a renascent Poland. Long before Europe was familiar with the engaging personality of the German Crown Prince, he represented great airships sailing over England (which country had been too unenterprising to make any) under the command of a singularly anticipatory Prince Karl, and in "The World Set Free" the last disturber of the peace is a certain "Balkan Fox."

In saying, however, here and there that "before such a year so-and-so will happen," or that "so-and-so will not occur for the next twenty years," he was generally pretty widely wrong; most of his time estimates are too short; he foretold, for example, a special motor track apart from the high road between London and Brighton before 1910, which is still a dream, but he doubted if effective military aviation or aerial fighting would be possible before 1950, which is a miss on the other side. He will draw a modest veil over certain still wider misses that the idle may find for themselves in his books; he prefers to count the hits and leave the reckoning of the misses to those who will find a pleasure in it.

Of course, these prophecies of the writer's were made upon a basis of very generalised knowledge. What can be done by a

really sustained research into a particular question-especially if it is a question essentially mechanical-is shown by the work of a Frenchman all too neglected by the trumpet of fame-Clement Ader. M. Ader was probably the first man to get a mechanism up into the air for something more than a leap. His *Eole*, as General Mensier testifies, prolonged a jump as far as fifty metres as early as 1890. In 1897 his *Avion* fairly flew. (This is a year ahead of the date of my earliest photograph of S.P. Langley's aeropile in mid-air.) This, however, is beside our present mark. The fact of interest here is that in 1908, when flying was still almost incredible, M. Ader published his "Aviation Militaire." Well, that was eight years ago, and men have been fighting in the air now for a year, and there is still nothing being done that M. Ader did not see, and which we, if we had had the wisdom to attend to him, might not have been prepared for. There is much that he foretells which is still awaiting its inevitable fulfilment. So clearly can men of adequate knowledge and sound reasoning power see into the years ahead in all such matters of material development.

But it is not with the development of mechanical inventions that the writer now proposes to treat. In this book he intends to hazard certain forecasts about the trend of events in the next decade or so. Mechanical novelties will probably play a very small part in that coming history. This world-wide war means a general arrest of invention and enterprise, except in the direction of the war business. Ability is concentrated upon that; the types

of ability that are not applicable to warfare are neglected; there is a vast destruction of capital and a waste of the savings that are needed to finance new experiments. Moreover, we are killing off many of our brightest young men.

It is fairly safe to assume that there will be very little new furniture on the stage of the world for some considerable time; that if there is much difference in the roads and railways and shipping it will be for the worse; that architecture, domestic equipment, and so on, will be fortunate if in 1924 they stand where they did in the spring of 1914. In the trenches of France and Flanders, and on the battlefields of Russia, the Germans have been spending and making the world spend the comfort, the luxury and the progress of the next quarter-century. There is no accounting for tastes. But the result is that, while it was possible for the writer in 1900 to write "Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical Progress upon Human Life and Thought," in 1916 his anticipations must belong to quite another system of consequences.

The broad material facts before us are plain enough. It is the mental facts that have to be unravelled. It isn't now a question of "What thing-what faculty-what added power will come to hand, and how will it affect our ways of living?" It is a question of "How are people going to take these obvious things-waste of the world's resources, arrest of material progress, the killing of a large moiety of the males in nearly every European country, and universal loss and unhappiness?" We are going to deal with

realities here, at once more intimate and less accessible than the effects of mechanism.

As a preliminary reconnaissance, as it were, over the region of problems we have to attack, let us consider the difficulties of a single question, which is also a vital and central question in this forecast. We shall not attempt a full answer here, because too many of the factors must remain unexamined; later, perhaps, we may be in a better position to do so. This question is the probability of the establishment of a long world peace.

At the outset of the war there was a very widely felt hope among the intellectuals of the world that this war might clear up most of the outstanding international problems, and prove the last war. The writer, looking across the gulf of experience that separates us from 1914, recalls two pamphlets whose very titles are eloquent of this feeling-"The War that will End War," and "The Peace of the World." Was the hope expressed in those phrases a dream? Is it already proven a dream? Or can we read between the lines of the war news, diplomatic disputations, threats and accusations, political wranglings and stories of hardship and cruelty that now fill our papers, anything that still justifies a hope that these bitter years of world sorrow are the darkness before the dawn of a better day for mankind? Let us handle this problem for a preliminary examination.

What is really being examined here is the power of human reason to prevail over passion-and certain other restraining and qualifying forces. There can be little doubt that, if one could

canvass all mankind and ask them whether they would rather have no war any more, the overwhelming mass of them would elect for universal peace. If it were war of the modern mechanical type that was in question, with air raids, high explosives, poison gas and submarines, there could be no doubt at all about the response. "Give peace in our time, O Lord," is more than ever the common prayer of Christendom, and the very war makers claim to be peace makers; the German Emperor has never faltered in his assertion that he encouraged Austria to send an impossible ultimatum to Serbia, and invaded Belgium because Germany was being attacked. The Krupp-Kaiser Empire, he assures us, is no eagle, but a double-headed lamb, resisting the shearers and butchers. The apologists for war are in a hopeless minority; a certain number of German Prussians who think war good for the soul, and the dear ladies of the London *Morning Post* who think war so good for the manners of the working classes, are rare, discordant voices in the general chorus against war. If a mere unsupported and uncoordinated will for peace could realise itself, there would be peace, and an enduring peace, to-morrow. But, as a matter of fact, there is no peace coming to-morrow, and no clear prospect yet of an enduring universal peace at the end of this war.

Now what are the obstructions, and what are the antagonisms to the exploitation of this world-wide disgust with war and the world-wide desire for peace, so as to establish a world peace?

Let us take them in order, and it will speedily become apparent

that we are dealing here with a subtle quantitative problem in psychology, a constant weighing of whether this force or that force is the stronger. We are dealing with influences so subtle that the accidents of some striking dramatic occurrence, for example, may turn them this way or that. We are dealing with the human will-and thereby comes a snare for the feet of the would-be impartial prophet. To foretell the future is to modify the future. It is hard for any prophet not to break into exhortation after the fashion of the prophets of Israel.

The first difficulty in the way of establishing a world peace is that it is nobody's business in particular. Nearly all of us want a world peace-in an amateurish sort of way. But there is no specific person or persons to whom one can look for the initiatives. The world is a supersaturated solution of the will-for-peace, and there is nothing for it to crystallise upon. There is no one in all the world who is responsible for the understanding and overcoming of the difficulties involved. There are many more people, and there is much more intelligence concentrated upon the manufacture of cigarettes or hairpins than upon the establishment of a permanent world peace. There are a few special secretaries employed by philanthropic Americans, and that is about all. There has been no provision made even for the emoluments of these gentlemen when universal peace is attained; presumably they would lose their jobs.

Nearly everybody wants peace; nearly everybody would be glad to wave a white flag with a dove on it now-provided no unfair

use was made of such a demonstration by the enemy-but there is practically nobody thinking out the arrangements needed, and nobody making nearly as much propaganda for the instruction of the world in the things needful as is made in selling any popular make of automobile. We have all our particular businesses to attend to. And things are not got by just wanting them; things are got by getting them, and rejecting whatever precludes our getting them.

That is the first great difficulty: the formal Peace Movement is quite amateurish.

It is so amateurish that the bulk of people do not even realise the very first implication of the peace of the world. It has not succeeded in bringing this home to them.

If there is to be a permanent peace of the world, it is clear that there must be some permanent means of settling disputes between Powers and nations that would otherwise be at war. That means that there must be some head power, some point of reference, a supreme court of some kind, a universally recognised executive over and above the separate Governments of the world that exist to-day. That does not mean that those Governments Have to disappear, that "nationality" has to be given up, or anything so drastic as that. But it does mean that all those Governments have to surrender almost as much of their sovereignty as the constituent sovereign States which make up the United States of America have surrendered to the Federal Government; if their unification is to be anything more than

a formality, they will have to delegate a control of their inter-State relations to an extent for which few minds are prepared at present.

It is really quite idle to dream of a warless world in which States are still absolutely free to annoy one another with tariffs, with the blocking and squeezing of trade routes, with the ill-treatment of immigrants and travelling strangers, and between which there is no means of settling boundary disputes. Moreover, as between the united States of the world and the United States of America there is this further complication of the world position: that almost all the great States of Europe are in possession, firstly, of highly developed territories of alien language and race, such as Egypt; and, secondly, of barbaric and less-developed territories, such as Nigeria or Madagascar. There will be nothing stable about a world settlement that does not destroy in these "possessions" the national preference of the countries that own them and that does not prepare for the immediate or eventual accession of these subject peoples to State rank. Most certainly, however, thousands of intelligent people in those great European countries who believe themselves ardent for a world peace will be staggered at any proposal to place any part of "our Empire" under a world administration on the footing of a United States territory. Until they cease to be staggered by anything of the sort, their aspirations for a permanent peace will remain disconnected from the main current of their lives. And that current will flow, sluggishly or rapidly, towards war. For essentially these

"possessions" are like tariffs, like the strategic occupation of neutral countries or secret treaties; they are forms of the conflict between nations to oust and prevail over other nations.

Going on with such things and yet deprecating war is really not an attempt to abolish conflict; it is an attempt to retain conflict and limit its intensity; it is like trying to play hockey on the understanding that the ball shall never travel faster than eight miles an hour.

Now it not only stands in our way to a permanent peace of the world that the great mass of men are not prepared for even the most obvious implications of such an idea, but there is also a second invincible difficulty-that there is nowhere in the world anybody, any type of men, any organisation, any idea, any nucleus or germ, that could possibly develop into the necessary over-Government. We are asking for something out of the air, out of nothingness, that will necessarily array against itself the resistance of all those who are in control, or interested in the control, of the affairs of sovereign States of the world as they are at present; the resistance of a gigantic network of Government organisations, interests, privileges, assumptions.

Against this a headless, vague aspiration, however universal, is likely to prove quite ineffective. Of course, it is possible to suggest that the Hague Tribunal is conceivably the germ of such an overriding direction and supreme court as the peace of the world demands, but in reality the Hague Tribunal is a mere legal automatic machine. It does nothing unless you set it in motion. It

has no initiative. It does not even protest against the most obvious outrages upon that phantom of a world-conscience-international law.

Pacificists in their search for some definite starting-point, about which the immense predisposition for peace may crystallise, have suggested the Pope and various religious organisations as a possible basis for the organisation of peace. But there would be no appeal from such a beginning to the non-Christian majority of mankind, and the suggestion in itself indicates a profound ignorance of the nature of the Christian churches. With the exception of the Quakers and a few Russian sects, no Christian sect or church has ever repudiated war; most have gone out of the way to sanction it and bless it.

It is altogether too rashly assumed by people whose sentimentality outruns their knowledge that Christianity is essentially an attempt to carry out the personal teachings of Christ. It is nothing of the sort, and no church authority will support that idea. Christianity-more particularly after the ascendancy of the Trinitarian doctrine was established-was and is a theological religion; it is the religion that triumphed over Arianism, Manichseism, Gnosticism, and the like; it is based not on Christ, but on its creeds. Christ, indeed, is not even its symbol; on the contrary, the chosen symbol of Christianity is the cross to which Christ was nailed and on which He died. It was very largely a religion of the legions. It was the warrior Theodosius who, more than any single other man, imposed it upon Europe.

There is no reason, therefore, either in precedent or profession, for expecting any plain lead from the churches in this tremendous task of organising and making effective the widespread desire of the world for peace. And even were this the case, it is doubtful if we should find in the divines and dignitaries of the Vatican, of the Russian and British official churches, or of any other of the multitudinous Christian sects, the power and energy, the knowledge and ability, or even the goodwill needed to negotiate so vast a thing as the creation of a world authority.

One other possible starting-point has been suggested. It is no great feat for a naive imagination to suppose the President of the Swiss Confederation or the President of the United States-for each of these two systems is an exemplary and encouraging instance of the possibility of the pacific synthesis of independent States-taking a propagandist course and proposing extensions of their own systems to the suffering belligerents.

But nothing of the sort occurs. And when you come to look into the circumstances of these two Presidents you will discover that neither of them is any more free than anybody else to embark upon the task of creating a State-overriding, war-preventing organisation of the world. He has been created by a system, and he is bound to a system; his concern is with the interests of the people of Switzerland or of the United States of America. President Wilson, for example, is quite sufficiently occupied by the affairs of the White House, by the clash of political parties, by interferences with American overseas trade and the security

of American citizens. He has no more time to give to projects for the fundamental reconstruction of international relationships than has any recruit drilling in England, or any captain on an ocean liner, or any engineer in charge of a going engine.

We are all, indeed, busy with the things that come to hand every day. We are all anxious for a permanent world peace, but we are all up to the neck in things that leave us no time to attend to this world peace that nearly every sane man desires.

Meanwhile, a small minority of people who trade upon contention-militarists, ambitious kings and statesmen, war contractors, loan mongers, sensational journalists-follow up their interests and start and sustain war.

There lies the paradoxical reality of this question. Our first inquiry lands us into the elucidation of this deadlock. Nearly everybody desires a world peace, and yet there is not apparent anywhere any man free and able and willing to establish it, while, on the other hand, there are a considerable number of men in positions of especial influence and power who will certainly resist the arrangements that are essential to its establishment.

But does this exhaust the question, and must we conclude that mankind is doomed to a perpetual, futile struggling of States and nations and peoples-breaking ever and again into war? The answer to that would probably, be "Yes" if it were not for the progress of war. War is continually becoming more scientific, more destructive, more coldly logical, more intolerant of non-combatants, and more exhausting of any kind of property. There

is every reason to believe that it will continue to intensify these characteristics. By doing so it may presently bring about a state of affairs that will supply just the lacking elements that are needed for the development of a world peace.

I would venture to suggest that the present war is doing so now: that it is producing changes in men's minds that may presently give us both the needed energy and the needed organisation from which a world direction may develop.

The first, most distinctive thing about this conflict is the exceptionally searching way in which it attacks human happiness. No war has ever destroyed happiness so widely. It has not only killed and wounded an unprecedented proportion of the male population of all the combatant nations, but it has also destroyed wealth beyond precedent. It has also destroyed freedom-of movement, of speech, of economic enterprise. Hardly anyone alive has escaped the worry of it and the threat of it. It has left scarcely a life untouched, and made scarcely a life happier. There is a limit to the principle that "everybody's business is nobody's business." The establishment of a world State, which was interesting only to a few cranks and visionaries before the war, is now the lively interest of a very great number of people. They inquire about it; they have become accessible to ideas about it.

Peace organisation seems, indeed, to be following the lines of public sanitation. Everybody in England, for example, was bored by the discussion of sanitation-until the great cholera epidemic.

Everybody thought public health a very desirable thing, but nobody thought it intensely and overridingly desirable. Then the interest in sanitation grew lively, and people exerted themselves to create responsible organisations. Crimes of violence, again, were neglected in the great cities of Europe until the danger grew to dimensions that evolved the police. There come occasions when the normal concentration of an individual upon his own immediate concerns becomes impossible; as, for instance, when a man who is stocktaking in his business premises discovers that the house next door is on fire. A great many people who have never troubled their heads about anything but their own purely personal and selfish interests are now realising that quite a multitude of houses about them are ablaze, and that the fire is spreading.

That is one change the war will bring about that will make for world peace: a quickened general interest in its possibility. Another is the certainty that the war will increase the number of devoted and fanatic characters available for disinterested effort. Whatever other outcome this war may have, it means that there lies ahead a period of extreme economic and political dislocation. The credit system has been strained, and will be strained, and will need unprecedented readjustments. In the past such phases of uncertainty, sudden impoverishment and disorder as certainly lie ahead of us, have meant for a considerable number of minds a release-or, if you prefer it, a flight-from the habitual and selfish. Types of intense religiosity, of devotion and of endeavour are

let loose, and there will be much more likelihood that we may presently find, what it is impossible to find now, a number of devoted men and women ready to give their whole lives, with a quasi-religious enthusiasm, to this great task of peace establishment, finding in such impersonal work a refuge from the disappointments, limitations, losses and sorrows of their personal life-a refuge we need but little in more settled and more prosperous periods. They will be but the outstanding individuals in a very universal quickening. And simultaneously with this quickening of the general imagination by experience there are certain other developments in progress that point very clearly to a change under the pressure of this war of just those institutions of nationality, kingship, diplomacy and inter-State competition that have hitherto stood most effectually in the way of a world pacification. The considerations that seem to point to this third change are very convincing, to my mind.

The real operating cause that is, I believe, going to break down the deadlock that has hitherto made a supreme court and a federal government for the world at large a dream, lies in just that possibility of an "inconclusive peace" which so many people seem to dread. Germany, I believe, is going to be beaten, but not completely crushed, by this war; she is going to be left militarist and united with Austria and Hungary, and unchanged in her essential nature; and out of that state of affairs comes, I believe, the hope for an ultimate confederation of the nations of the earth.

Because, in the face of a league of the Central European

Powers attempting recuperation, cherishing revenge, dreaming of a renewal of the struggle, it becomes impossible for the British, the French, the Belgians, Russians, Italians or Japanese to think any longer of settling their differences by war among themselves. To do so will mean the creation of opportunity for the complete reinstatement of German militarism. It will open the door for a conclusive German hegemony. Now, however clumsy and confused the diplomacy of these present Allies may be (challenged constantly, as it is, by democracy and hampered by a free, venal and irresponsible Press in at least three of their countries), the necessity they will be under will be so urgent and so evident, that it is impossible to imagine that they will not set up some permanent organ for the direction and co-ordination of their joint international relationships. It may be a queerly constituted body at first; it may be of a merely diplomatic pretension; it may be called a Congress, or any old name of that sort, but essentially its business will be to conduct a joint fiscal, military and naval policy, to keep the peace in the Balkans and Asia, to establish a relationship with China, and organise joint and several arbitration arrangements with America. And it must develop something more sure and swift than our present diplomacy. One of its chief concerns will be the right of way through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and the watching of the forces that stir up conflict in the Balkans and the Levant. It must have unity enough for that; it must be much more than a mere leisurely, unauthoritative conference of representatives.

For precisely similar reasons it seems to me incredible that the two great Central European Powers should ever fall into sustained conflict again with one another. They, too, will be forced to create some overriding body to prevent so suicidal a possibility. America too, it may be, will develop some Pan-American equivalent. Probably the hundred millions of Latin America may achieve a method of unity, and then deal on equal terms with the present United States. The thing has been ably advocated already in South America. Whatever appearances of separate sovereignties are kept up after the war, the practical outcome of the struggle is quite likely to be this: that there will be only three great World Powers left-the anti-German allies, the allied Central Europeans, the Pan-Americans. And it is to be noted that, whatever the constituents of these three Powers may be, none of them is likely to be a monarchy. They may include monarchies, as England includes dukedoms. But they will be overriding alliances, not overriding rulers. I leave it to the mathematician to work out exactly how much the chances of conflict are diminished when there are practically only three Powers in the world instead of some scores. And these new Powers will be in certain respects unlike any existing European "States." None of the three Powers will be small or homogeneous enough to serve dynastic ambitions, embody a national or racial Kultur, or fall into the grip of any group of financial enterprises. They will be more comprehensive, less romantic, and more businesslike altogether. They will be, to use a phrase suggested

a year or so ago, Great States… And the war threat between the three will be so plain and definite, the issues will be so lifted out of the spheres of merely personal ambition and national feeling, that I do not see why the negotiating means, the standing conference of the three, should not ultimately become the needed nucleus of the World State for which at present we search the world in vain.

There are more ways than one to the World State, and this second possibility of a post-war conference and a conference of the Allies, growing almost unawares into a pacific organisation of the world, since it goes on directly from existing institutions, since it has none of the quality of a clean break with the past which the idea of an immediate World State and Pax Mundi involves, and more particularly since it neither abolishes nor has in it anything to shock fundamentally the princes, the diplomatists, the lawyers, the statesmen and politicians, the nationalists and suspicious people, since it gives them years in which to change and die out and reappear in new forms, and since at the same time it will command the support of every intelligent human being who gets his mind clear enough from his circumstances to understand its import, is a far more credible hope than the hope of anything coming *de novo* out of Hague Foundations or the manifest logic of the war.

But, of course, there weighs against these hopes the possibility that the Allied Powers are too various in their nature, too biased, too feeble intellectually and imaginatively, to hold together and

maintain any institution for co-operation. The British Press may be too silly not to foster irritation and suspicion; we may get Carsonism on a larger scale trading on the resuscitation of dying hatreds; the British and Russian diplomatists may play annoying tricks upon one another by sheer force of habit. There may be many troubles of that sort. Even then I do not see that the hope of an ultimate world peace vanishes. But it will be a Roman world peace, made in Germany, and there will have to be several more great wars before it is established. Germany is too homogeneous yet to have begun the lesson of compromise and the renunciation of the dream of national conquest. The Germans are a national, not an imperial people. France has learnt that through suffering, and Britain and Russia because for two centuries they have been imperial and not national systems. The German conception of world peace is as yet a conception of German ascendancy. The Allied conception becomes perforce one of mutual toleration.

But I will not press this inquiry farther now. It is, as I said at the beginning, a preliminary exploration of one of the great questions with which I propose to play in these articles. The possibility I have sketched is the one that most commends itself to me as probable. After a more detailed examination of the big operating forces at present working in the world, we may be in a position to revise these suggestions with a greater confidence and draw our net of probabilities a little tighter.

II. THE END OF THE WAR [1]

The prophet who emerges with the most honour from this war is Bloch. It must be fifteen or sixteen years ago since this gifted Pole made his forecast of the future. Perhaps it is more, for the French translation of his book was certainly in existence before the Boer War. His case was that war between antagonists of fairly equal equipment must end in a deadlock because of the continually increasing defensive efficiency of entrenched infantry. This would give the defensive an advantage over the most brilliant strategy and over considerably superior numbers that would completely discourage all aggression. He concluded that war was played out.

His book was very carefully studied in Germany. As a humble disciple of Bloch I should have realised this, but I did not, and that failure led me into some unfortunate prophesying at the outbreak of the war. I judged Germany by the Kaiser, and by the Kaiser-worship which I saw in Berlin. I thought that he was a theatrical person who would dream of vast massed attacks and tremendous cavalry charges, and that he would lead Germany to be smashed against the Allied defensive in the West, and to

[1] This chapter was originally a newspaper article. It was written in December, 1915, and published about the middle of January. Some of it has passed from the quality of anticipation to achievement, but I do not see that it needs any material revision on that account.

be smashed so thoroughly that the war would be over. I did not properly appreciate the more studious and more thorough Germany that was to fight behind the Kaiser and thrust him aside, the Germany we British fight now, the Ostwald-Krupp Germany of 1915. That Germany, one may now perceive, had read and thought over and thought out the Bloch problem.

There was also a translation of Bloch into French. In English a portion of his book was translated for the general reader and published with a preface by the late Mr. W.T. Stead. It does not seem to have reached the British military authorities, nor was it published in England with an instructive intention. As an imaginative work it would have been considered worthless and impracticable.

But it is manifest now that if the Belgian and French frontiers had been properly prepared-as they should have been prepared when the Germans built their strategic railways-with trenches and gun emplacements and secondary and tertiary lines, the Germans would never have got fifty miles into either France or Belgium. They would have been held at Liége and in the Ardennes. Five hundred thousand men would have held them indefinitely. But the Allies had never worked trench warfare; they were unready for it, Germans knew of their unreadiness, and their unreadiness it is quite clear they calculated. They did not reckon, it is now clear that they were right in not reckoning, the Allies as contemporary soldiers. They were going to fight a 1900 army with a 1914 army, and their whole opening scheme was

based on the conviction that the Allies would not entrench.

Somebody in those marvellous maxims from the dark ages that seem to form the chief reading of our military experts, said that the army that entrenches is a defeated army. The silly dictum was repeated and repeated in the English papers after the battle of the Marne. It shows just where our military science had reached in 1914, namely, to a level a year before Bloch wrote. So the Allies retreated.

For long weeks the Allies retreated out of the west of Belgium, out of the north of France, and for rather over a month there was a loose mobile war-as if Bloch had never existed. The Germans were not fighting the 1914 pattern of war, they were fighting the 1899 pattern of war, in which direct attack, outflanking and so on were still supposed to be possible; they were fighting confident in their overwhelming numbers, in their prepared surprise, in the unthought-out methods of their opponents. In the "Victorian" war that ended in the middle of September, 1914, they delivered their blow, they over-reached, they were successfully counter-attacked on the Marne, and then abruptly-almost unfairly it seemed to the British sportsmanlike conceptions-they shifted to the game played according to the very latest rules of 1914. The war did not come up to date until the battle of the Aisne. With that the second act of the great drama began.

I do not believe that the Germans ever thought it would come up to date so soon. I believe they thought that they would hustle the French out of Paris, come right up to the Channel at

Calais before the end of 1914, and then entrench, produce the submarine attack and the Zeppelins against England, working from Calais as a base, and that they would end the war before the spring of 1915-with the Allies still a good fifteen years behindhand.

I believe the battle of the Marne was the decisive battle of the war, in that it shattered this plan, and that the rest of the 1914 fighting was Germany's attempt to reconstruct their broken scheme in the face of an enemy who was continually getting more and more nearly up to date with the fighting. By December, Bloch, who had seemed utterly discredited in August, was justified up to the hilt. The world was entrenched at his feet. By May the lagging military science of the British had so far overtaken events as to realise that shrapnel was no longer so important as high explosive, and within a year the significance of machine guns, a significance thoroughly ventilated by imaginative writers fifteen years before, was being grasped by the conservative but by no means inadaptable leaders of Britain.

The war since that first attempt-admirably planned and altogether justifiable (from a military point of view, I mean) – of Germany to "rush" a victory, has consisted almost entirely of failures on both sides either to get round or through or over the situation foretold by Bloch. There has been only one marked success, the German success in Poland due to the failure of the Russian munitions. Then for a time the war in the East

was mobile and precarious while the Russians retreated to their present positions, and the Germans pursued and tried to surround them. That was a lapse into the pre-Bloch style. Now the Russians are again entrenched, their supplies are restored, the Germans have a lengthened line of supplies, and Bloch is back upon his pedestal so far as the Eastern theatre goes.

Bloch has been equally justified in the Anglo-French attempt to get round through Gallipoli. The forces of the India Office have pushed their way through unprepared country towards Bagdad, and are now entrenching in Mesopotamia, but from the point of view of the main war that is too remote to be considered either getting through or getting round; and so too the losses of the German colonies and the East African War are scarcely to be reckoned with in the main war. They have no determining value. There remains the Balkan struggle. But the Balkan struggle is something else; it is something new. It must be treated separately. It is a war of treacheries and brags and appearances. It is not a part of, it is a sequence to, the deadlock war of 1915.

But before dealing with this new development of the latter half of 1915 it is necessary to consider certain general aspects of the deadlock war. It is manifest that the Germans hoped to secure an effective victory in this war before they ran up against Bloch. But reckoning with Bloch, as they certainly did, they hoped that even in the event of the war getting to earth, it would still be possible to produce novelties that would sufficiently neutralise Bloch to secure a victorious peace. With unexpectedly

powerful artillery suddenly concentrated, with high explosives, with asphyxiating gas, with a well-organised system of grenade throwing and mining, with attacks of flaming gas, and above all with a vast munition-making plant to keep them going, they had a very reasonable chance of hacking their way through.

Against these prepared novelties the Allies have had to improvise, and on the whole the improvisation has kept pace with the demands made upon it. They have brought their military science up to date, and to-day the disparity in science and equipment between the antagonists has greatly diminished. There has been no escaping Bloch after all, and the deadlock, if no sudden peace occurs, can end now in only one thing, the exhaustion in various degrees of all the combatants and the succumbing of the most exhausted. The idea of a conclusive end of the traditional pattern to this war, of a triumphal entry into London, Paris, Berlin or Moscow, is to be dismissed altogether from our calculations. The end of this war will be a matter of negotiation between practically immobilised and extremely shattered antagonists.

There is, of course, one aspect of the Bloch deadlock that the Germans at least have contemplated. If it is not possible to get through or round, it may still be possible to get over. There is the air path.

This idea has certainly taken hold of the French mind, but France has been too busy and is temperamentally too economical to risk large expenditures upon what is necessarily

an experiment. The British are too conservative and sceptical to be the pioneers in any such enterprise. The Russians have been too poor in the necessary resources of mechanics and material.

The Germans alone have made any sustained attempt to strike through the air at their enemies beyond the war zone. Their Zeppelin raids upon England have shown a steadily increasing efficiency, and it is highly probable that they will be repeated on a much larger scale before the war is over. Quite possibly, too, the Germans are developing an accessory force of large aeroplanes to co-operate in such an attack. The long coasts of Britain, the impossibility of their being fully equipped throughout their extent, except at a prohibitive cost of men and material, to resist air invaders, exposes the whole length of the island to considerable risk and annoyance from such an expedition.

It is doubtful, though, if the utmost damage an air raid is likely to inflict upon England would count materially in the exhaustion process, and the moral effect of these raids has been, and will be, to stiffen the British resolution to fight this war through to the conclusive ending of any such possibilities.

The net result of these air raids is an inflexible determination of the British people rather to die in death grips with German militarism than to live and let it survive. The best chance for the aircraft was at the beginning of the war, when a surprise development might have had astounding results. That chance has gone by. The Germans are racially inferior to both French and English in the air, and the probability of effective blows over the

deadlock is on the whole a probability in favour of the Allies. Nor is there anything on or under the sea that seems likely now to produce decisive results. We return from these considerations to a strengthened acceptance of Bloch.

The essential question for the prophet remains therefore the question of which group of Powers will exhaust itself most rapidly. And following on from that comes the question of how the successive stages of exhaustion will manifest themselves in the combatant nations. The problems of this war, as of all war, end as they begin in national psychology.

But it will be urged that this is reckoning without the Balkans. I submit that the German thrust through the wooded wilderness of Serbia is really no part of the war that has ended in the deadlock of 1915. It is dramatic, tragic, spectacular, but it is quite inconclusive. Here there is no way round or through to any vital centre of Germany's antagonists. It turns nothing; it opens no path to Paris, London, or Petrograd. It is a long, long way from the Danube to either Egypt or Mesopotamia, and there-and there-Bloch is waiting. I do not think the Germans have any intention of so generous an extension of their responsibilities. The Balkan complication is no solution of the deadlock problem. It is the opening of the sequel.

A whole series of new problems are opened up directly we turn to this most troubled region of the Balkans-problems of the value of kingship, of nationality, of the destiny of such cities as Constantinople, which from their very beginning have never

had any sort of nationality at all, of the destiny of countries such as Albania, where a tangle of intense tribal nationalities is distributed in spots and patches, or Dalmatia, where one extremely self-conscious nation and language is present in the towns and another in the surrounding country, or Asia Minor, where no definite national boundaries, no religious, linguistic, or social homogeneities have ever established themselves since the Roman legions beat them down.

But all these questions can really be deferred or set aside in our present discussion, which is a discussion of the main war. Whatever surprises or changes this last phase of the Eastern Empire, that blood-clotted melodrama, may involve, they will but assist and hasten on the essential conclusion of the great war, that the Central Powers and their pledged antagonists are in a deadlock, unable to reach a decision, and steadily, day by day, hour by hour, losing men, destroying material, spending credit, approaching something unprecedented, unknown, that we try to express to ourselves by the word exhaustion.

Just how the people who use the word "exhaustion" so freely are prepared to define it, is a matter for speculation. The idea seems to be a phase in which the production of equipped forces ceases through the using up of men or material or both. If the exhaustion is fairly mutual, it need not be decisive for a long time. It may mean simply an ebb of vigour on both sides, unusual hardship, a general social and economic disorganisation and grading down. The fact that a great killing off of men is

implicit in the process, and that the survivors will be largely under discipline, militates against the idea that the end may come suddenly through a vigorous revolutionary outbreak. Exhaustion is likely to be a very long and very thorough process, extending over years. A "war of attrition" may last into 1918 or 1919, and may bring us to conditions of strain and deprivation still only very vaguely imagined. What happens in the Turkish Empire or India or America or elsewhere may extend the areas of waste and accelerate or retard the process, but is quite unlikely to end it.

Let us ask now which of the combatants is likely to undergo exhaustion most rapidly, and what is of equal or greater importance, which is likely to feel it first and most? No doubt there is a bias in my mind, but it seems to me that the odds are on the whole heavily against the Central Powers. Their peculiar German virtue, their tremendously complete organisation, which enabled them to put so large a proportion of their total resources into their first onslaught and to make so great and rapid a recovery in the spring of 1915, leaves them with less to draw upon now. Out of a smaller fortune they have spent a larger sum. They are blockaded to a very considerable extent, and against them fight not merely the resources of the Allies, but, thanks to the complete British victory in the sea struggle, the purchasable resources of all the world.

Conceivably the Central Powers will draw upon the resources of their Balkan and Asiatic allies, but the extent to which they can do that may very easily be over-estimated. There is a limit to

the power for treason of these supposititious German monarchs that Western folly has permitted to possess these Balkan thrones-thrones which need never have been thrones at all-and none of the Balkan peoples is likely to witness with enthusiasm the complete looting of its country in the German interest by a German court. Germany will have to pay on the nail for most of her Balkan help. She will have to put more into the Balkans than she takes out.

Compared with the world behind the Allies the Turkish Empire is a country of mountains, desert and undeveloped lands. To develop these regions into a source of supplies under the strains and shortages of war-time, will be an immense and dangerous undertaking for Germany. She may open mines she may never work, build railways that others will enjoy, sow harvests for alien reaping. The people the Bulgarians want in Bulgaria are not Germans but Bulgarians; the people the Turks want in Anatolia are not Germans but Turks. And for all these tasks Germany must send men. Men?

At present, so far as any judgment is possible, Germany is feeling the pinch of the war much more even than France, which is habitually parsimonious, and instinctively cleverly economical, and Russia, which is hardy and insensitive. Great Britain has really only begun to feel the stress. She has probably suffered economically no more than have Holland or Switzerland, and Italy and Japan have certainly suffered less. All these three great countries are still full of men, of gear, of saleable futures. In

every part of the globe Great Britain has colossal investments. She has still to apply the great principle of conscription not only to her sons but to the property of her overseas investors and of her landed proprietors. She has not even looked yet at the German financial expedients of a year ago. She moves reluctantly, but surely, towards such a thoroughness of mobilisation. There need be no doubt that she will completely socialise herself, completely reorganise her whole social and economic structure sooner than lose this war. She will do it clumsily and ungracefully, with much internal bickering, with much trickery on the part of her lawyers, and much baseness on the part of her landlords; but she will do it not so slowly as a logical mind might anticipate. She will get there a little late, expensively, but still in time…

The German group, I reckon, therefore, will become exhausted first. I think, too, that Germany will, as a nation, feel and be aware of what is happening to her sooner than any other of the nations that are sharing in this process of depletion. In 1914 the Germans were reaping the harvest of forty years of economic development and business enterprise. Property and plenty were new experiences, and a generation had grown up in whose world a sense of expansion and progress was normal. There existed amongst it no tradition of the great hardship of war, such as the French possessed, to steel its mind. It had none of the irrational mute toughness of the Russians and British. It was a sentimental people, making a habit of success; it rushed chanting to war against the most grimly heroic and the most

stolidly enduring of races. Germany came into this war more buoyantly and confidently than any other combatant. It expected another 1871; at the utmost it anticipated a year of war.

Never were a people so disillusioned as the Germans must already be, never has a nation been called upon for so complete a mental readjustment. Neither conclusive victories nor defeats have been theirs, but only a slow, vast transition from joyful effort and an illusion of rapid triumph to hardship, loss and loss and loss of substance, the dwindling of great hopes, the realisation of ebb in the tide of national welfare. Now they must fight on against implacable, indomitable Allies. They are under stresses now as harsh at least as the stresses of France. And, compared with the French, the Germans are untempered steel.

We know little of the psychology of this new Germany that has come into being since 1871, but it is doubtful if it will accept defeat, and still more doubtful how it can evade some ending to the war that will admit the failure of all its great hopes of Paris subjugated, London humbled, Russia suppliant, Belgium conquered, the Near East a prey. Such an admission will be a day of reckoning that German Imperialism will postpone until the last hope of some breach among the Allies, some saving miracle in the old Eastern Empire, some dramatically-snatched victory at the eleventh hour, is gone.

Nor can the Pledged Allies consent to a peace that does not involve the evacuation and compensation of Belgium and Serbia, and at least the autonomy of the lost Rhine provinces of France.

That is their very minimum. That, and the making of Germany so sick and weary of military adventure that the danger of German ambition will cease to overshadow European life. Those are the ends of the main war. Europe will go down through stage after stage of impoverishment and exhaustion until these ends are attained, or made for ever impossible.

But these things form only the main outline of a story with a vast amount of collateral interest. It is to these collateral issues that the amateur in prophecy must give his attention. It is here that the German will be induced by his Government to see his compensations. He will be consoled for the restoration of Serbia by the prospect of future conflicts between Italian and Jugoslav that will let him in again to the Adriatic. His attention will be directed to his newer, closer association with Bulgaria and Turkey. In those countries he will be told he may yet repeat the miracle of Hungary. And there may be also another Hungary in Poland. It will be whispered to him that he has really conquered those countries when indeed it is highly probable he has only spent his substance in setting up new assertive alien allies. The Kaiser, if he is not too afraid of the precedent of Sarajevo, may make a great entry into Constantinople, with an effect of conquering what is after all only a temporarily allied capital. The German will hope also to retain his fleet, and no peace, he will be reminded, can rob him of his hard-earned technical superiority in the air. The German air fleet of 1930 may yet be something as predominant as the British Navy of 1915, and capable of

delivering a much more intimate blow. Had he not better wait for that? When such consolations as these become popular in the German Press we of the Pledged Allies may begin to talk of peace, for these will be its necessary heralds.

The concluding phase of a process of general exhaustion must almost inevitably be a game of bluff. Neither side will admit its extremity. Neither side, therefore, will make any direct proposals to its antagonists nor any open advances to a neutral. But there will be much inspired peace talk through neutral media, and the consultations of the anti-German allies will become more intimate and detailed. Suggestions will "leak out" remarkably from both sides, to journalists and neutral go-betweens. The Eastern and Western Allies will probably begin quite soon to discuss an anti-German Zollverein and the co-ordination of their military and naval organisations in the days that are to follow the war. A discussion of a Central European Zollverein is already afoot. A general idea of the possible rearrangement of the European States after the war will grow up in the common European and American mind; public men on either side will indicate concordance with this general idea, and some neutral power, Denmark or Spain or the United States or Holland, will invite representatives to an informal discussion of these possibilities.

Probably, therefore, the peace negotiations will take the extraordinary form of two simultaneous conferences-one of the Pledged Allies, sitting probably in Paris or London, and the

other of representatives of all the combatants meeting in some neutral country-Holland would be the most convenient-while the war will still be going on. The Dutch conference would be in immediate contact by telephone and telegraph with the Allied conference and with Berlin…

The broad conditions of a possible peace will begin to get stated towards the end of 1916, and a certain lassitude will creep over the operations in the field… The process of exhaustion will probably have reached such a point by that time that it will be a primary fact in the consciousness of common citizens of every belligerent country. The common life of all Europe will have become-miserable. Conclusive blows will have receded out of the imagination of the contending Powers. The war will have reached its fourth and last stage as a war. The war of the great attack will have given place to the war of the military deadlock; the war of the deadlock will have gone on, and as the great combatants have become enfeebled relatively to the smaller States, there will have been a gradual shifting of the interest to the war of treasons and diplomacies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Quickly thereafter the last phase will be developing into predominance, in which each group of nations will be most concerned, no longer about victories or conquests, but about securing for itself the best chances of rapid economic recuperation and social reconstruction. The commercial treaties, the arrangements for future associated action, made by the great Allies among themselves will appear more and more important

to them, and the mere question of boundaries less and less. It will dawn upon Europe that she has already dissipated the resources that have enabled her to levy the tribute paid for her investments in every quarter of the earth, and that neither the Germans nor their antagonists will be able for many years to go on with those projects for world exploitation which lay at the root of the great war. Very jaded and anaemic nations will sit about the table on which the new map of Europe will be drawn… Each of the diplomatists will come to that business with a certain pre-occupation. Each will be thinking of his country as one thinks of a patient of doubtful patience and temper who is coming-to out of the drugged stupor of a crucial, ill-conceived, and unnecessary operation … Each will be thinking of Labour, wounded and perplexed, returning to the disorganised or nationalised factories from which Capital has gone a-fighting, and to which it may never return.

III. NATIONS IN LIQUIDATION

The war has become a war of exhaustion. One hears a great deal of the idea that "financial collapse" may bring it to an end. A number of people seem to be convinced that a war cannot be waged without money, that soldiers must be paid, munitions must be bought; that for this money is necessary and the consent of bank depositors; so that if all the wealth of the world were nominally possessed by some one man in a little office he could stop the war by saying simply, "I will lend you no more money."

Now, as a matter of fact, money is a power only in so far as people believe in it and Governments sustain it. If a State is sufficiently strong and well organised, its control over the money power is unlimited. If it can rule its people, and if it has the necessary resources of men and material within its borders, it can go on in a state of war so long as these things last, with almost any flimsy sort of substitute for money that it chooses to print. It can enrol and use the men, and seize and work the material. It can take over the land and cultivate it and distribute its products. The little man in the office is only a power because the State chooses to recognise his claim. So long as he is convenient he seems to be a power. So soon as the State is intelligent enough and strong enough it can do without him. It can take what it wants, and tell him to go and hang himself. That is the melancholy ultimate of the usurer. That is the quintessence of "finance." All credit is

State-made, and what the State has made the State can alter or destroy.

The owner and the creditor have never had any other power to give or withhold credit than the credit that was given to them. They exist by sufferance or superstition and not of necessity.

It is the habit of overlooking this little flaw in the imperatives of ownership that enables people to say that this war cannot go on beyond such and such a date-the end of 1916 is much in favour just now-because we cannot pay for it. It would be about as reasonable to expect a battle to end because a landlord had ordered the soldiers off his estate. So long as there are men to fight and stuff to fight with the war can go on. There is bankruptcy, but the bankruptcy of States is not like the bankruptcy of individuals. There is no such thing among States as an undischarged bankrupt who is forbidden to carry on. A State may keep on going bankrupt indefinitely and still carry on. It will be the next step in our prophetic exercise to examine the differences between State bankruptcy and the bankruptcy of a subject of the State.

The belligerent Powers are approaching a phase when they will no longer be paying anything like twenty shillings in the pound. In a very definite sense they are not paying twenty shillings in the pound now. That is not going to stop the war, but it involves a string of consequences and possibilities of the utmost importance to our problem of what is coming when the war is over.

The exhaustion that will bring this war to its end at last is a process of destruction of men and material. The process of bankruptcy that is also going on is nothing of the sort. Bankruptcy destroys no concrete thing; it merely writes off a debt; it destroys a financial but not an economic reality. It is, in itself, a mental, not a physical fact. "A" owes "B" a debt; he goes bankrupt and pays a dividend, a fraction of his debt, and gets his discharge. "B's" feelings, as we novelists used to say, are "better imagined than described"; he does his best to satisfy himself that "A" can pay no more, and then "A" and "B" both go about their business again.

In England, if "A" is a sufficiently poor man not to be formidable, and has gone bankrupt on a small scale, he gets squeezed ferociously to extract the last farthing from him; he may find himself in jail and his home utterly smashed up. If he is a richer man, and has failed on a larger scale, our law is more sympathetic, and he gets off much more easily. Often his creditors find it advisable to arrange with him so that he will still carry on with his bankrupt concern. They find it is better to allow him to carry on than to smash him up.

There are countless men in the world living very comfortably indeed, and running businesses that were once their own property for their creditors. There are still more who have written off princely debts and do not seem to be a "ha'p'orth the worse." And their creditors have found a balm in time and philosophy. Bankruptcy is only painful and destructive to small people and

helpless people; but then for them everything is painful and destructive; it can be a very light matter to big people; it may be almost painless to a State.

If England went bankrupt in the completest way to-morrow, and repudiated all its debts both as a nation and as a community of individuals, if it declared, if I may use a self-contradictory phrase, a permanent moratorium, there would be not an acre of ploughed land in the country, not a yard of cloth or a loaf of bread the less for that. There would be nothing material destroyed within the State. There would be no immediate convulsion. Use and wont would carry most people on some days before they even began to doubt whether So-and-so could pay his way, and whether there would be wages at the end of the week.

But people who lived upon rent or investments or pensions would presently be very busy thinking how they were going to get food when the butcher and baker insisted upon cash. It would be only with comparative slowness that the bulk of men would realise that a fabric of confidence and confident assumptions had vanished; that cheques and bank notes and token money and every sort of bond and scrip were worthless, that employers had nothing to pay with, shopkeepers no means of procuring stock, that metallic money was disappearing, and that a paralysis had come upon the community.

Such an establishment as a workhouse or an old-fashioned monastery, living upon the produce of its own farming and supplying all its own labour, would be least embarrassed amidst

the general perplexity. For it would not be upon a credit basis, but a socialistic basis, a basis of direct reality, and its need for payments would be incidental. And land-owning peasants growing their own food would carry on, and small cultivating occupiers, who could easily fall back on barter for anything needed.

The mass of the population in such a country as England would, however, soon be standing about in hopeless perplexity and on the verge of frantic panic-although there was just as much food to be eaten, just as many houses to live in, and just as much work needing to be done. Suddenly the pots would be empty, and famine would be in the land, although the farms and butchers' shops were still well stocked. The general community would be like an automobile when the magneto fails. Everything would be there and in order, except for the spark of credit which keeps the engine working.

That is how quite a lot of people seem to imagine national bankruptcy: as a catastrophic jolt. It is a quite impossible nightmare of cessation. The reality is the completest contrast. All the belligerent countries of the world are at the present moment quietly, steadily and progressively going bankrupt, and the mass of people are not even aware of this process of insolvency.

An individual when he goes bankrupt is measured by the monetary standard of the country he is in; he pays five or ten or fifteen or so many shillings in the pound. A community in debt does something which is in effect the same, but in appearance

rather different. It still pays a pound, but the purchasing power of the pound has diminished. This is what is happening all over the world to-day; there is a rise in prices. This is automatic national bankruptcy; unplanned, though perhaps not unforeseen. It is not a deliberate State act, but a consequence of the interruption of communications, the diversion of productive energy, the increased demand for many necessities by the Government and the general waste under war conditions.

At the beginning of this war England had a certain national debt; it has paid off none of that original debt; it has added to it tremendously; so far as money and bankers' records go it still owes and intends to pay that original debt; but if you translate the language of £.s.d. into realities, you will find that in loaves or iron or copper or hours of toil, or indeed in any reality except gold, it owes now, so far as that original debt goes, far less than it did at the outset. As the war goes on and the rise in prices continues, the subsequent borrowings and contracts are undergoing a similar bankrupt reduction. The attempt of the landlord of small weekly and annual properties to adjust himself to the new conditions by raising rents is being checked by legislation in Great Britain, and has been completely checked in France. The attempts of labour to readjust wages have been partially successful in spite of the eloquent protests of those great exponents of plain living, economy, abstinence, and honest, modest, underpaid toil, Messrs. Asquith, McKenna, and Runciman. It is doubtful if the rise in wages is keeping pace with

the rise in prices. So far as it fails to do so the load is on the usual pack animal, the poor man.

The rest of the loss falls chiefly upon the creditor class, the people with fixed incomes and fixed salaries, the landlords, who have let at long leases, the people with pensions, endowed institutions, the Church, insurance companies, and the like. They are all being scaled down. They are all more able to stand scaling down than the proletarians.

Assuming that it is possible to bring up wages to the level of the higher prices, and that the rise in rents can be checked by legislation or captured by taxation, the rise in prices is, on the whole, a thing to the advantage of the propertyless man as against accumulated property. It writes off the past and clears the way for a fresh start in the future.

An age of cheapness is an old usurers' age. England before the war was a paradise of ancient usuries; everywhere were great houses and enclosed parks; the multitude of gentlemen's servants and golf clubs and such like excrescences of the comfort of prosperous people was perpetually increasing; it did not "pay" to build labourers' cottages, and the more expensive sort of automobile had driven the bicycle as a pleasure vehicle off the roads. Western Europe was running to fat and not to muscle, as America is to-day.

But if that old usurer's age is over, the young usurer's age may be coming. To meet such enormous demands as this war is making there are three chief courses open to the modern State.

The first is to *take*-to get men by conscription and material by requisition. The British Government *takes* more modestly than any other in the world; its tradition from Magna Charta onward, the legal training of most of its members, all make towards a reverence for private ownership and private claims, as opposed to the claims of State and commonweal, unequalled in the world's history.

The next course of a nation in need is to *tax* and pay for what it wants, which is a fractional and more evenly distributed method of taking. Both of these methods raise prices, the second most so, and so facilitate the automatic release of the future from the boarding of the past. So far all the belligerent Governments have taxed on the timid side.

Finally there is the *loan*. This mortgages the future to the present necessity, and it has so far been the predominant source of war credits. It is the method that produces least immediate friction in the State; it employs all the savings of surplus income that the unrest of civil enterprise leaves idle; it has an effect of creating property by a process that destroys the substance of the community. In Germany an enormous bulk of property has been mortgaged to supply the subscriptions to the war loans, and those holdings have again been hypothecated to subscribe to subsequent loans. The Pledged Allies with longer stockings have not yet got to this pitch of overlapping. But everywhere in Europe what is happening is a great transformation of the property owner into a *rentier*, and the passing of realty into the hands of the State.

At the end of the war Great Britain will probably find herself with a national debt so great that she will be committed to the payment of an annual interest greater in figures than the entire national expenditure before the war. As an optimistic lady put it the other day: "All the people who aren't killed will be living quite comfortably on War Loan for the rest of their lives."

But part, at least, of the bulk of this wealth will be imaginary rather than real because of the rise in prices, in wages, in rent, and in taxation. Most of us who are buying the British and French War Loans have no illusions on that score; we know we are buying an income of diminishing purchasing power. Yet it would be a poor creature in these days when there is scarcely a possible young man in one's circle who has not quite freely and cheerfully staked his life, who was not prepared to consider his investments as being also to an undefined extent a national subscription.

A rise in prices is not, however, the only process that will check the appearance of a new rich usurer class after the war. There is something else ahead that has happened already in Germany, that is quietly coming about among the Allies, and that is the cessation of gold payments. In Great Britain, of course, the pound note is still convertible into a golden sovereign; but Great Britain will not get through the war on those terms. There comes a point in the stress upon a Government when it must depart from the austerer line of financial rectitude-and tamper in some way with currency.

Sooner or later, and probably in all cases before 1917, all the

belligerents will be forced to adopt inconvertible paper money for their internal uses. There will be British assignats or greenbacks. It will seem to many financial sentimentalists almost as though Great Britain were hauling down a flag when the sovereign, which has already disappeared into bank and Treasury coffers, is locked up there and reserved for international trade. But Great Britain has other sentiments to consider than the finer feelings of bankers and the delicacies of usury. The pound British will come out of this war like a company out of a well-shelled trench-attenuated.

Depreciation of the currency means, of course, a continuing rise in prices, a continuing writing off of debt. If labour has any real grasp of its true interests it will not resent this. It will merely insist steadfastly on a proper adjustment of its wages to the new standard. On that point, however, it will be better to write later…

Let us see how far we have got in this guessing. We have considered reasons that seem to point to the destruction of a great amount of old property and old debt, and the creation of a great volume of new debt before the end of the war, and we have adopted the ideas that currency will probably have depreciated more and more and prices risen right up to the very end.

There will be by that time a general habit of saving throughout the community, a habit more firmly established perhaps in the propertied than in the wages-earning class. People will be growing accustomed to a dear and insecure world. They will adopt a habit of caution; become desirous of saving and security.

Directly the phase of enormous war loans ends, the new class of *rentiers* holding the various great new national loans will find themselves drawing this collectively vast income and anxious to invest it. They will for a time be receiving the bulk of the unearned income of the world. Here, in the high prices representing demand and the need for some reinvestment of interest representing supply, we have two of the chief factors that are supposed to be necessary to a phase of business enterprise. Will the economic history of the next few decades be the story of a restoration of the capitalistic system upon a new basis? Shall we all become investors, speculators, or workers toiling our way to a new period of security, cheapness and low interest, a restoration of the park, the enclosure, the gold standard and the big automobile, with only this difference-that the minimum wage will be somewhere about two pounds, and that a five-pound note will purchase about as much as a couple of guineas would do in 1913?

That is practically parallel with what happened in the opening half of the nineteenth century after the Napoleonic wars, and it is not an agreeable outlook for those who love the common man or the nobility of life. But if there is any one principle sounder than another of all those that guide the amateur in prophecy, it is that *history never repeats itself*. The human material in which those monetary changes and those developments of credit will occur will be entirely different from the social medium of a hundred years ago.

The nature of the State has altered profoundly in the last century. The later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries constituted a period of extreme individualism. What were called "economic forces" had unrestricted play. In the minds of such people as Harriet Martineau and Herbert Spencer they superseded God. People were no longer reproached for "flying in the face of Providence," but for "flying in the face of Political Economy."

In that state of freedom you got whatever you could in any way you could; you were not your neighbour's keeper, and except that it interfered with the enterprise of pickpockets, burglars and forgers, and kept the dice loaded in favour of landlords and lawyers, the State stood aside from the great drama of human getting. For industrialism and speculation the State's guiding maxim was *laissez faire*.

The State is now far less aloof and far more constructive. It is far more aware of itself and a common interest. Germany has led the way from a system of individuals and voluntary associations in competition towards a new order of things, a completer synthesis. This most modern State is far less a swarming conflict of businesses than a great national business. It will emerge from this war much more so than it went in, and the thing is and will remain so plain and obvious that only the greediest and dullest people among the Pledged Allies will venture to disregard it. The Allied nations, too, will have to rescue their economic future from individual grab and grip and chance.

The second consideration that forbids us to anticipate any parallelism of the history of 1915-45 with 1815-45 is the greater lucidity of the general mind, the fact that all Western Europe, down to the agricultural labourers, can read and write and does read newspapers and "get ideas." The explanation of economic and social processes that were mysterious to the elect a hundred years ago are now the commonplaces of the tap-room. What happened then darkly, and often unconsciously, must happen in 1916-26 openly and controllably. The current bankruptcy and liquidation and the coming reconstruction of the economic system of Europe will go on in a quite unprecedented amount of light. We shall see and know what is happening much more clearly than anything of the kind has ever been seen before.

It is not only that people will have behind them, as a light upon what is happening, the experiences and discussions of a hundred years, but that the international situation will be far plainer than it has ever been. This war has made Germany the central fact in all national affairs about the earth. It is not going to destroy Germany, and it seems improbable that either defeat or victory, or any mixture of these, will immediately alter the cardinal fact of Germany's organised aggressiveness.

The war will not end the conflict of anti-Germany and Germany, That will only end when the results of fifty years of aggressive education in Germany have worn away. This will be so plain that the great bulk of people everywhere will not only see their changing economic relationships far more distinctly

than such things have been seen hitherto, but that they will see them as they have never been seen before, definitely orientated to the threat of German world predominance. The landlord who squeezes, the workman who strikes and shirks, the lawyer who fogs and obstructs, will know, and will know that most people know, that what he does is done, not under an empty, regardless heaven, but in the face of an unsleeping enemy and in disregard of a continuous urgent necessity for unity.

So far we have followed this speculation upon fairly firm ground, but now our inquiry must plunge into a jungle of far more difficult and uncertain possibilities. Our next stage brings us to the question of how people and peoples and classes of people are going to react to the new conditions of need and knowledge this war will have brought about, and to the new demands that will be made upon them.

This is really a question of how far they will prove able to get out of the habits and traditions of their former social state, how far they will be able to take generous views and make sacrifices and unselfish efforts, and how far they will go in self-seeking or class selfishness regardless of the common welfare. This is a question we have to ask separately of each great nation, and of the Central Powers as a whole, and of the Allies as a whole, before we can begin to estimate the posture of the peoples of the world in, say, 1946.

Now let me here make a sort of parenthesis on human nature. It will be rather platitudinous, but it is a necessary reminder for

what follows.

So far as I have been able to observe, nobody lives steadily at one moral level. If we are wise we shall treat no man and no class-and for the matter of that no nation-as either steadfastly malignant or steadfastly disinterested. There are phases in my life when I could die quite cheerfully for an idea; there are phases when I would not stir six yards to save a human life. Most people fluctuate between such extremes. Most people are self-seeking, but most people will desist from a self-seeking cause if they see plainly and clearly that it is not in the general interest, and much more readily if they also perceive that other people are of the same mind and know that they know their course is unsound.

The fundamental error of orthodox political economy and of Marxian socialism is to assume the inveterate selfishness of everyone. But most people are a little more disposed to believe what it is to their interest to believe than the contrary. Most people abandon with reluctance ways of living and doing that have served them well. Most people can see the neglect of duty in other classes more plainly than they do in their own.

This war has brought back into the everyday human life of Europe the great and overriding conception of devotion to a great purpose. But that does not imply clear-headedness in correlating the ways of one's ordinary life with this great purpose. It is no good treating as cynical villainy things that merely exhibit the incapacity of our minds to live consistently.

One Labour paper a month or so ago was contrasting Mr.

Asquith's eloquent appeals to the working man to economise and forgo any rise in wages with the photographs that were appearing simultaneously in the smart papers of the very smart marriage of Mr. Asquith's daughter. I submit that by that sort of standard none of us will be blameless. But without any condemnation, it is easy to understand that the initiative to tax almost to extinction large automobiles, wedding dresses, champagne, pâté de foie gras and enclosed parks, instead of gin and water, bank holiday outings and Virginia shag, is less likely to come from the Prime Minister class than from the class of dock labourers. There is an unconscious class war due to habit and insufficient thinking and insufficient sympathy that will play a large part in the distribution of the burthen of the State bankruptcy that is in progress, and in the subsequent readjustment of national life.

And having made this parenthesis, I may perhaps go on to point out the peculiar limitations under which various classes will be approaching the phase of reorganisation, without being accused of making this or that class the villain of an anticipatory drama.

Now, three great classes will certainly resist the valiant reconstruction of economic life with a vigour in exact proportion to their baseness, stupidity and narrowness of outlook. They will, as classes, come up for a moral judgment, on whose verdict the whole future of Western civilisation depends. If they cannot achieve a considerable, an unprecedented display of self-sacrifice, unselfish wisdom, and constructive vigour, if

the community as a whole can produce no forces sufficient to restrain their lower tendencies, then the intelligent father had better turn his children's faces towards the New World. For Europe will be busy with social disorder for a century.

The first great class is the class that owns and holds land and land-like claims upon the community, from the Throne downward. This Court and land-holding class cannot go on being rich and living rich during the strains of the coming years. The reconstructing world cannot bear it. Whatever rises in rent may occur through the rise in prices, must go to meet the tremendous needs of the State.

This class, which has so much legislative and administrative power in at least three of the great belligerents-in Great Britain and Germany perhaps most so-must be prepared to see itself taxed, and must be willing to assist in its own taxation to the very limit of its statistical increment. The almost vindictive greed of the landowners that blackened the history of England after Waterloo, and brought Great Britain within sight of revolution, must not be repeated. The British Empire cannot afford a revolution in the face of the Central European Powers. But in the past century there has been an enormous change in men's opinions and consciences about property; whereas we were Individualists, now we are Socialists. The British lord, the German junker, has none of the sense of unqualified rights that his great-grandfather had, and he is aware of a vigour of public criticism that did not exist in the former time…

How far will these men get out of the tradition of their birth and upbringing?

Next comes the great class of lawyers who, through the idiotic method of voting in use in modern democracies, are able practically to rule Great Britain, and who are powerful and influential in all democratic countries.

In order to secure a certain independence and integrity in its courts, Great Britain long ago established the principle of enormously overpaying its judges and lawyers. The natural result has been to give our law courts and the legal profession generally a bias in favour of private wealth against both the public interest and the proletariat. It has also given our higher national education an overwhelming direction towards the training of advocates and against science and constructive statecraft. An ordinary lawyer has no idea of making anything; that tendency has been destroyed in his mind; he waits and sees and takes advantage of opportunity. Everything that can possibly be done in England is done to make our rulers Micawbers and Artful Dodgers.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.