

## LIBERALISM AND THE WAR.

The great war has been a cause of profound grief to all who believe in democratic government and international peace. It has seemed to them that everything they cherished has been overwhelmed by a tide of savagery rising swiftly from springs of national hate. All their dreams of human progress are destroyed. All their plans for social betterment are shipwrecked. The accumulated national wealth that they hoped to apply to vast campaigns against poverty, disease and vice, by which the nations would have a new birth of freedom, is being blown into the air. The flower of the young manhood of the nations has been turned into cannon fodder. Militarism, the foe of democracy, the breeder of privilege, is enthroned. A great nation, leading the world in many fields of human endeavor, has reverted to barbarism in a night, throwing off the veneer of civilization and revealing to an astonished universe the lineaments of the Goth and the Hun. In the midst of such a cataclysm, Liberalism, thunderstruck and heart-broken, wonders if the end of the world for it has not come; if there is any escape from a new cycle of savagery, in which all the resources of civilization will be employed to buttress barbaric systems of government.

To these feelings of despair a braver spirit is succeeding; and Liberalism, in all lands beneath the sway of western civilization, is now bracing itself for the great task before it—the task of making this catastrophic war a blessing to this weary war-cursed world, of ensuring that these tens of thousands of ardent young souls who are giving up their lives on sea and land shall not die in vain. This war, as is now clear, had to come. For the first month of the conflict the view was often expressed that this was a causeless, unnecessary war, the terrible result of the blundering of diplomatists. A great English journal even referred to it as a "passionless" war because no great principle was at stake. Today the passions excited by this war go deeper than ever before—never were there such tremendous and far-reaching issues submitted to the judgment of the sword. The cannon has blown down the walls of the fool's paradise in which we lived, with a blissful confidence that the rising power of democracy and the growing commercial interdependence of the nations would gradually establish an era of permanent international peace. We see now that the powers of reaction were far too strong for these unifying and peace-favoring influences—and the old issue of freedom or tyranny has once more to be settled in the grim old way by the judgment of war.

This war will either liberalize or Prussianize the world. The Prussianization of the world by the victory of Germany is a remote contingency; the Kaiser and his hosts will break themselves against the impregnable defenses of the nations they seek to conquer. But Germany, in defeat, might infect the world with the poison which has been her own undoing. It must be the special business of democrats everywhere to see

that no such catastrophe follows this war. Napoleon, a century ago, had to be defeated if the world were not to become the football of a military adventurer; but his overthrow left Europe in the grip of the Holy Alliance, whose theories of government have found their perfect fulfilment in the Prussia of today.

Assuming, as we think we have a right to do, the ultimate victory of the Allies, the future of the world will depend upon the manner in which the war ends. To carry it too far would be almost as fatal as to end it too soon. There is a danger that the aggressors, recognizing the futility of their enterprise, may take steps to bring about a peace which will be nothing but a truce. We shall probably be saved from this by the Kaiser's vanity; but it is possible that he may have the sense to see, after the blood-letting has continued for another three months, that he has attempted the impossible. In that event he might secure an adjustment of the war upon conditions which would enable Germany to renew her plans for an attempt at world-conquest at a later date. That could only result in all the nations of the world setting about the business of re-arming themselves upon a scale hitherto unknown. Even though the forms of democracy might be preserved, military exigencies would determine our national policies, and the soldier would be the controlling figure in our government. We could not escape conscription, or something very like it. There would be no money available for great schemes of social reconstruction. We should produce our own Treitschkes and Bernhardis. All programmes of social betterment and political reform could be put aside for a century. In that event one could echo Huxley's desire that, if progress were impossible, a wandering comet should come along and destroy the world.

The war is not, however, likely to end too soon, but it may be prolonged too long. We must not overlook the significant fact that if the world, after the conclusion of this war, is to enter upon a period of peace and partial disarmament the German people must be consenting parties. The German race in Central Europe numbers at least seventy-five million souls. They cannot be crushed, any more than an equal number of Anglo-Saxons could be beaten into a state of abject subjection. If this war is to free the world from its horrible burden of militarism, it must first open the eyes of the German people to the wickedness and folly of the ideals which they have been cultivating for the past forty years. This world's tragedy is the direct consequence of the failure of Liberalism to make a stand in Germany against the absolutism of the Kaiser and the growing domination of the Prussian military caste. By the default of Liberalism in Germany, that nation lost the beacon lights by which it might have found its way to political freedom. It has been a country without a free press, a free parliament or free universities—the State, which was merely the other name for a huge military machine, has controlled all the agencies of discussion and education. The exception to this generalization—the existence of the Social Democratic party—was not a factor of any weight in the government of the country.

Now, the war, if it is to have any justification for its frightful cost in life and treasure, must bring about a state of affairs in Germany that will not only put power into the hands of the people but will liberate the people from the barbaric racial superstitions that have obsessed them—the idea that they are the chosen people, that they have a right to dominate the world, that there is no such thing as international morality, that might is right, that anything done by a German for the supposed advantage of Germany is thereby consecrated and purified, however repellent it may be to old-fashioned ideas of morality and decency. The only means to this liberation are a vigorous war and a just peace—a war which will demonstrate to the Germans that their ideas of world-conquest are impracticable, and a peace which, having in it the minimum of humiliation, will facilitate a re-union of the democracies of the nations now at war, which is the only guarantee of future peace. The people of Germany should not be left with a legitimate grievance which would make them the willing victims of a new generation of militarists who will attempt to succeed the discredited war lords of today.

This, then, should be the war programme for Liberalism in the British Empire: The undiminished prosecution of the war, by every means within our power, until the military power of Germany is definitely overthrown; then a helping hand to the disillusioned and disheartened German people, with a view to future friendship ushering in a period of peace and enabling the nations again to take up, under new and better auspices, the healing tasks of civilization. If this be the outcome, our sons and brothers shall not have given their lives in vain.