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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEADLOCK OF THE WAR APROPOS OF A "DAILY NEWS" ARTICLE

By Vernon Lee

ALL members of the U.D.C. have, of course, read President Wilson's address to the American League to Enforce Peace. I wish they had also read the deeply suggestive commentary upon it contained in the *Daily News* of June 17, and signed by the very eloquent, and what is more important, the very responsible writer known as "A. G. G.": partly, I cannot deny it, because it is encouraging occasionally to see our own heretical formulæ magnificently embroidered on the banners solemnly uplifted by the dignitaries of political orthodoxy. For instance, here is the *Daily News* jubilating that America will come forward:

"Not to redress that illusory thing, the *Balance of Power*, not to play her part in secret diplomacy or to cultivate alliances with this Power or that."

Nay, more surprising and gratifying still, the *Daily News* warns Europe that:

"Left to ourselves, we shall pursue the old path to ruin. The devil's engine of secret diplomacy will start weaving its webs on a new pattern, the despots will re-arrange their alliances, the armaments-ring will resume its international operations, the Press will be its corrupt instrument, the Parliaments will be left to play at democracy; the *Morning Post*, Mr. Maxse, and Lord Northcliffe, the Reventlows, and the Bernhardis will clear out the ashes of the fire that has devoured Europe, and will heap up the fuel for a new sacrifice to the God they serve."

Really the U.D.C. might almost spare itself the expense of further pamphlets and the odium of further speeches.

But it is not merely for the sake of discreet self complacency that I could have wished all members of the U.D.C. to have read "A. G. G.'s" "What does America stand for?" There is more serious and worthier comfort to be derived from it. And that is why I am going to copy out, and comment upon, one or two more of its principal passages.

For, explicitly as well as implicitly, "A. G. G." makes two essential, two momentous, admissions, from which he leaves his readers to draw their own inferences; inferences which a reference to American journals convert into black and white certainties.

"We are," he writes, "the victims of the Past, and are carrying the burden of a thousand years. Europe's sons are dying in millions for an ancient tale of wrong, for things done long ago and crimes that are forgotten."

Hence it would be merely adding to this tale of folly and cruelty if we presumed to apportion responsibilities and sought to mete out self-righteous chastisement. Neither does "A. G. G." allow us to believe that lasting peace can be secured through victory followed by war-like preparedness. For he tells us that:

"When we arm ourselves to the teeth we always say that it is to preserve ourselves against war, and we always find in the end that we are the creatures of the machine that we have created."

Hence it is to be presumed that only peace can beget peace. Moreover, "A. G. G." has, as you notice, laid the true blame of the war upon our common and universal Past, whose victims we are.

"We want," he continues, "to escape from this old tangle of circumstance, but we do not know how. We are like the wasps caught in the syrup of the jar. We see the light and the free air above, and we know that we could reach it if we could once free our wings from the mire of death, but in our struggles we trample each other down and accomplish our mutual destruction. The Old World cannot save itself alone."

And then Europe is offered a way out of what he calls "the pit." . . . "The New World comes in at last to redress the balance of the world."

At this point the *Daily News* ceases to be quite explicit. It allows those of its readers who are incapable of conceiving peace without preliminary "crushing," to believe that all this *redressing of the balance* is to take place only after a thorough-paced victory, for such readers are not likely to remember "A. G. G.'s" comparison of the belligerents to wasps struggling and killing each other in the *mire of death*. The *Daily News* cannot allow itself to say quite unambiguously that all this saving by the New World is to take place *before* the settlement; in fact, that the "pit," the clogging jam of blood, in which we are all vainly struggling, is the war itself. But American papers are not obliged to such reticence. And the very paper on whose account of President Wilson's address "A. G. G." founds his *Daily News* article, contains a sentence which leaves no doubt about the matter. "A. G. G." quotes at great length from the *New York New Republic* of June 3, but he omits one passage. Here it is:

"Our (*i.e.*, the American) offer to join in a guaranty of the world's peace, opens up the possibility of a quick and moderate peace. It gives to the Liberals of Europe a

practical thing to work with. They are now in a position to confront the extremists, and say to them: 'You tell us we must fight till the enemy is crushed, or there is no safety for our children.' But to crush the enemy is to come near to crushing ourselves. You offer us the phantom peace of total exhaustion, followed by insurrection and riot and degeneracy. But here is a chance to organise security with the untouched vigour of the richest people on earth. That is a better defence than anything you promise us. It is time to stop talking high-flown martial nonsense and begin to adjust concrete problems."

What America can do for us.

This additional passage, significantly omitted in the *Daily News'* long quotation, makes it quite clear what it is from which the New World can save us. America may indeed save us from future wars; but only by saving us ("We cannot save ourselves!") exclaims "A. G. G.") from the present one. America's guarantees of future peace can bring about peace in the present. The New World can put an end to the psychological deadlock.

Now, even if this war should prove not to have become a military stalemate, it has assuredly become what is even more difficult to deal with, a psychological deadlock. For consider what happens when people quarrel. Quarrelling means struggling, struggling means thinking of one's adversary as an obstacle, a danger, an evil; so quarrelling inevitably becomes blind and deluded, however reasonable and lucid its causes may originally have been. And if this is true of individuals, for ever kept within bounds by the criticism, nay, the mere indifference, of other individuals, how much truer of collectivities, whose consciousness in war-time is massed, segregated, standardised by every organ—Press, Parliament, literature, pulpit and poster—of their public life?

Hence, in the quarrels of nations, a thousand times more than in the quarrels of individuals, the need for an arbiter, a mediator, for a voice which is not one's own angry voice or the angry voice of the hated opponent. That way sanity lies.

But American mediation can bring something even more practically and pressingly needed by the Old World. Whatever the proximate, the ostensible and controllable origins of this war (and has not "A. G. G." told us that "Europe's sons are dying in millions for an ancient tale of wrong, for things done long ago and crimes that are forgotten"), this much has become evident, that the various combatants have reached the stage of keeping it up from sheer terror of its recurrence. As in that pathetic French newspaper cartoon, the soldier answers the child who is clinging to him—"I am going to kill or be killed in order that thou, my little son, mayst never have to kill or be killed." Moreover, besides the promise to the children, there is the sacred, nay, rather, the sacrilegious, the murderous loyalty to the dead: these sons and husbands and brothers shall not have died in vain! So each country goes on rather than have gone on so long to no purpose. Each nation insists upon having something to show in return for this incalculable, this endless sacrifice. That something is a guarantee for security of future peace. "Guarantees for security, guarantees, guarantees, guarantees!" is the universal hum behind the universal crash and roar. But to fight

means to make ghastly sacrifices, to run appalling risks, and to hate those who, making us fight, impose such sacrifices and risks. And hatred in its turn means distrust. No more *scraps of paper* for any of the nations! Hence each belligerent group fights on in the hope that the defeat or economic ruin of the other group can secure for itself a peaceful future. We are all fighting on for security, for guarantees of more or less eternal peace. This is the *war's psychological deadlock*. This is the mire of spiritual death, the mire of anger and fear and self justification and folly, into which, as much as into the material mud of corpses and shattered dwellings, we are all, as "A. G. G." describes us, trampling each other and plunging ourselves in our furious struggles to escape. And it is out of this that, as "A. G. G." has told us, "we cannot save ourselves," and that only neutrals can save us. For in our present state of mind we can accept guarantees only from neutrals, because it is only neutrals whom any of us belligerents can credit with the wisdom and probity which make a guarantee acceptable.

I hope that all the nations may lay to their hearts the address of President Wilson. I wish all English Liberals might have read "A. G. G.'s" comments upon it. As for us, who look with equal dismay at the indefinite protraction of the war and at any peace (alas, how inconclusive) disabling the adversary for a decade only to make him plot vengeance for a century, "A. G. G." has, without intending it, furnished us with the truest and most tragic formula of international brotherhood:

"We are the victims of our Past, and are carrying the burden of a thousand years. . . . We are the wasps caught in the syrup of the jar. We see the light and the free air above, and we know that we could reach it if only we could free our wings from the mire of death, but in our struggles we trample each other down and accomplish our mutual destruction."

DIPLOMACY

THE objects of diplomacy are not really national in the large sense of the term, but governmental; that is to say, the diplomatist is not expected to be familiar with wide national concerns, but rather to be intimately acquainted with the narrower trend of Cabinet and Chancellery questions, as they affect the governing persons of the respective countries. It is really a matter, not of nations in diplomacy, but of Courts and Cabinets. It does not so much regard the well-being of the nations as a whole, but is a kind of political gamble which civil rulers carry on among themselves, in which the people they represent take all the risks and put all the stakes on the table. A political personage of importance has declared that diplomacy compels even honest purpose to bow the knee, and men otherwise honourable to wear the mask of deceit without blushing; and this author whom I am quoting—himself a Member of Parliament at the time—in set terms accuses diplomacy of untruthfulness in its methods. That reminds us of Sir Henry Wotton's definition of an ambassador as an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country, which no doubt is an excess of satire. But we have Shakespeare putting it into the mouth of a Prince of Wales: "But for a kingdom, any oath may be broken."—*Dr. Walter Walsh*.