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# VERNON LEE WOULD END THE WAR

## ENGLISH Writer, in Strong Letter to Mme. Rosika Schwimmer, Lends Her Pen in Aid of Organized Protest of Women Against the Conflict, and Attacks the Policy of the British Government for Its Part in the Great European Struggle

VERNON LEE—in private life Violet Paget—the English author well known in America through her essays and European studies, has written a strong endorsement of the views animating the women of many lands who have united to bring about a termination of the war. She assails the policy of the English Government. It was addressed to Mme. Rosika Schwimmer, who inaugurated the movement which has already received the support of women's suffrage organizations in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Italy, Russia, Canada, Australia, Sweden, the National Council of Women in Norway, the Civil Union for the Right Understanding of International Interests, Great Britain, and the Women's Peace Association of Norway.

The substance of the plan recently laid before President Wilson is that he appoint an American representative who should go to Europe, there to call, in Norway, as the most suitable neutral country, a committee from neutral nations whose daily repeated offer to mediate would hasten the settlement of Europe's quarrel. Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, of New York, who is president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, of which Mme. Schwimmer is secretary, presented the appeal to the President, for one million women of thirteen countries.

Vernon Lee's letter, which follows, asserts that the present war spirit in England is based upon a myth. It was given out by the Empire State Votes for Women Committee, and read as follows:

### VERNON LEE'S LETTER.

"While confessing my incompetence to judge of its precise practical and technical details, will you allow me to express my absolute and very grateful concurrence in the views and intentions in your manifesto to all men, women, and organizations, who want to stop the international massacre at the earliest possible moment."

"Very grateful, not merely very sympathizing, concurrence. For your manifesto does not merely afford some hope of uniting the neutral and neutrally minded good-will of every country in favor of a speedy, an endurable, and therefore enduring peace, and of putting such international good-will under the leadership of America and the only quite able and quite blameless statesman of our day. Your manifesto also affords a rallying point, a possibility of collective consciousness and expression, to the feeling and judgment of those citizens (and they must be innumerable) of the belligerent countries who look upon this war as the abominable result of the ignorance, helplessness, apathy, and skepticism which have surrendered the judgment and volition of various peoples into the hands of prejudiced and blundering, even of infatuated or intriguing, leaders and teachers, whether belonging to Governments, to armament-mongers or to literature and the press.

"Madame, I am perhaps known to you and to some of the American readers to whom I pray you hand on this open letter, as that now alas! very futile thing, an essayist dealing with the various character and varied goodness and greatness of different nations ('Genius Loci,' 'The Sentimental Traveller,' and similar volumes); and a student of contemporary philosophical and ethical problems ('Gospels of Anarchy,' 'Vital Lies').

### HER EARLIER WRITINGS.

"I therefore require to prove my right of speaking at the present juncture and about the sole subject of present interest, by telling you that so far back as 1907 I answered in the *Westminster Gazette* an article by the French academician Paul Bourget calling upon England (on the occasion of King Edward's death) to help France to keep Germany in the place befitting her as a civilization without Latin (or he was civil enough to add) *even Anglo-Saxon order*, a civilization still unwashed of its muddy dross (*encore mal lavé de ses scories*), a civ-

ten upon the nationalization of armament factories as a defence against the panics artificially brought about by the (internationalized!) armament Trusts of all countries. In September, 1913, I wrote two articles in the *Westminster Gazette* showing that conscription, far from being a form of national education, was an interruption and impediment to it.

"Finally, in 1911, being in France immediately after the Agadir incident, and noticing that my French friends were willing for a war against Germany and counting upon England's help (after Mr. Lloyd George's Mansion House speech) in such a war, I wrote a letter in the *London Nation*, asking what was the precise meaning of the *Entente Cordiale*; which letter coincided with a number of Parliamentary interrogations leading to the Government's denial of the very "commitments" which, although not existing in legal form, we have now been told put England under an obligation of honor and gratitude to fight for the defence of the northwestern coasts of France (see Sir E. Grey's speech on beginning of the war). At the same time I have used the advantage of French being second language and of French friends being the most numerous I possess after English ones, to seek a hearing in favor of a Franco-German rapprochement among the French intellectuals and ex-Dreyfusards (*Correspondance*, organ of the *Union pour La Verité*, winter of 1911).

### DEFENCE OF THE "LIBERTIES."

"This long enumeration of what gives me a right to speak upon the origin of the present war will show you, and through you, I hope, some of our American friends, the reasons for which, unlike my colleagues of the English "Liberal" press and, alas, a large number of English men of letters, I find myself unable to seek self-justificatory consolation in the colossal and still daily growing myth of a defence not only of England's 'liberties,' but of all Europe's peace, civilization, and future progress, from a Minotaur of Prussian militarism employing an unwilling, but cowardly and idiotic Germany as the instrument of its infernal lusts.

"Madam, your appeal affords me an opportunity, refused from 'party loyalty' by even one of the once liberal and radical (as distinguished from the Socialist) papers of my country, to warn some of my compatriots against this myth of which they are the unsuspecting dupes. This war is not only slaughtering men and destroying the hard-gotten wealth, the miserable little earnings, of Europe's peoples. This war has strangled truth, and paralyzed the power and wish to face it; it is a triumph not only of death, but of death's incestuous parent, the Sin of untruth. I am not speaking of the victory—and atrocity—mongering of the press of all countries, but of something compared to which the partisan mendacities shared by all belligerents is a joke. I am not even speaking of any line of argument which may, or may not, have been suggested to newspapers whose party is not, as it was during the Boer War, in opposition, but in office.

### ENGLISH DOUBTS AND SCRUPLES.

"What I am speaking of is, I believe, a spontaneous product of the very doubts and scruples which English liberals entertained at the beginning of this war, and even publicly expressed before it, had become an accomplished fact. It is the result of honest people's inability to believe in the wrongness of a course of action into which they have allowed themselves to be trapped through years of diplomacy feeble on one side, unscrupulous on the other, and allowed themselves to be rushed in an unexpected hour of unresisting perplexity. It is the result of the inability of men and women knowing themselves to be sensible, honest, and humane in the relations of individual life, to believe that, as a collectivity, they can be acting in a manner the reverse of humane, or sensible or honest.

"For people engaged in war, people

if Germany had respected Belgian neutrality, we should yet, as indeed Sir E. Grey (White Paper Dispatch 119) warned the German Ambassador, "if France and Germany became involved in war, we should be drawn into it."

"That is what I call *fighting for nothing at all*, or for a perfect topsy-turvy of logic and honor. Closing this parenthesis, I repeat that it is psychologically impossible for a people to admit this to itself. So with every additional sacrifice, with every additional moment of panic, with every additional knowledge of coming financial ruin, it becomes more and more difficult to face that tiny unnoticed seed of apathy and unintelligence which has grown into the vast overshadowing horror of this war. And so there has arisen the self-justificatory myth of defence of our prosperity and liberties against a country with which, sole among our larger neighbors, we have never once been at war. And this myth of self-defence had quickly turned into the myth of the defence of disarmament and peace, hence civilization and progress, against a Prussian militarism which has been made responsible not only for this war, but for the years of warlike expenditure into which the scaremongers of the armament trusts have pushed us, just as their syndicated foreign associates have pushed every continental country.

"This myth was bound to arise spontaneously in the mind of every English liberal trying to justify himself and his Government for this unintelligible cataclysm. This myth has been sincerely and unanimously enlarged, defined, given shape and voice, by alas, most of the popular English writers of the day: Mr. H. G. Wells led off on the very day of the war's declaration with an article declaring 'that every sword now drawn for England was a sword drawn for peace'; the exciting biographer of 'Sherlock Holmes' has recently joined in with a characteristic detective romance about a 'Prussian Conspiracy.'

"And the poets! They, even more than the prose writers, have bid England save Europe, and what is more unexpected, deliver poor, helpless Germany from the Prussian monster. 'Surgeon her, ye Nations!' one of these sonneteers has written, describing the present war as a cancer-operation to which the deserving German invalid is being submitted for her ultimate recovery. And what the writers have written and the poets have sung, the British public, suddenly become unexpectedly sensitive to phrases and catch-words, has repeated, repeats, and, alas, thinks and feels with absolute sincerity. The myth of the German Minotaur demanding its tribute of human flesh, has penetrated into the most unlikely minds and places.

"And it is, madam, just because this spontaneously generated but artificially nurtured self-justificatory myth now overshadows the imagination of so many of my compatriots, that I welcome more than ever your manifesto calling upon a constantly renewed, a chronic offer of mediation on the part of the really neutral countries under the presidency of the United States. We in England, with the exception of the Independent Labor party, have no chance of hearing the truth except from the lips of neutral and sister nations; and those among us (and they are numerous and represent our most responsible intelligence, our sincerest morality, and most independent political life) who know in silence, or suspect, or are open to receive, the truth, will obtain through such an international organization as you propose, the incomparable help of learning that they are not alone in the world, not cranks and traitors, but are united to the wisdom and true patriotism of every country in defying the myth and facing the truth.

"Now, madam, upon the defiance of this monstrous myth of British self-justification, upon the defiance of the similar self-justificatory myths which have doubtless arisen in every one of the belligerent countries, depends, if not the speedy, at all events the decent and safe, ending of all this butchery and destruction and mendacity. It is not the diplomatists and soldiers who can end it otherwise than in some new sowing of dragon's teeth. It is the peaceful interests which have been sacrificed, the human affections which have been violated; it is the network of international coöperation in trade, in art, in science, and in progress which has been rent and trampled in blood and mud; it is those who need peace and believe in peace through peace, who alone should end this war. And, therefore, in God's name, let us cry for help against our self-justificatory delusions, to those nations who are still guiltless and in possession of their judgment and volition."

### To a Greek Girl.

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Across the years you seem to come.—

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"The same summer in which I answered this significant manifestation of what the Entente Cordiale was beginning to mean to French nationalists (and it gradually turned all except socialistic Frenchmen into avowed or unavowed nationalists) I published two separate translations, one in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, and one in the (London) *Nation*, of an article in which the Bavarian, extremely anti-Prussian, free-trading economist, Lujo Brentano, pointed out that what enabled the *Flottenverein* to squeeze money out of unwilling German voters was England's long-standing (since the sixties) refusal to listen to the wishes of all other Governments (and to the voice of Richard Cobden in his day) and abolish the antiquated rights of capture of private and peaceful property by sea, rights which put the commerce, the industry, and even the victualling of every adversary of Great Britain at the mercy of Great Britain's enormously superior sea-power.

"Upon this subject of extending to private property on sea the same inviolability which private property has long enjoyed on land, I have continued to write, translate, and answer articles and letters during two years in the *London Nation*, the *New Statesman*, and other English papers; I have similarly writ-

ten a letter in the *London Nation*, asking what was the precise meaning of the *Entente Cordiale*; which letter coincided with a number of Parliamentary interrogations leading to the Government's denial of the very "commitments" which, although not existing in legal form, we have now been told put England under an obligation of honor and gratitude to fight for the defence of the northwestern coasts of France (see Sir E. Grey's speech on beginning of the war). At the same time I have used the advantage of French being second language and of French friends being the most numerous I possess after English ones, to seek a hearing in favor of a Franco-German rapprochement among the French intellectuals and ex-Dreyfusards (*Correspondance*, organ of the *Union pour La Verité*, winter of 1911).

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"For people engaged in war, people called upon to make vast sacrifices for that war are psychologically incapable of recognizing that they are sacrificing themselves and others for nothing at all; for nothing at all which has any logical cogency. Since we are officially fighting for "a solemn international obligation" (Asquith's speech Aug. 6, 1914), thirty, nay ninety\* years, older than the treaty guarantees of Moroccan independence which we had violated by secret arrangements with France even before we signed them at Algéciras (vide E. D. Morel's "Morocco in Diplomacy"); for a "solemn international obligation" thirty, nay ninety years older than the international agreements to protect Persian independence which we violated a few months after they were made by open coöperation with Russia (vide Brailsford, "Fruits of our Russian Alliance," 1912); sacrificing ourselves, I repeat it, for nothing having any logical cogency or existence, since, while our Prime Minister told us we were fighting for the neutrality and protection of Belgium, our Foreign Minister had put it to the House of Commons and the nation whether we were not in honor bound to defend the French North-Western coasts left defenceless for some months past by France's loan of her Channel Fleet to replace a fleet of ours in the Mediterranean, so that even

\*Note—The treaty securing Belgian neutrality was naturally aimed at France; it was made in 1831, revised in 1839, and in 1870 separate treaties between Great Britain and France, and Prussia, were made in accordance with the treaty of 1839, to hold for the period of the Franco-Prussian war only.

Government, the unintelligible cataclysm. This myth has been sincerely and unanimously enlarged, defined, given shape and voice, by alas, most of the popular English writers of the day: Mr. H. G. Wells led off on the very day of the war's declaration with an article declaring 'that every sword now drawn for England was a sword drawn for peace'; the exciting biographer of 'Sherlock Holmes' has recently joined in with a characteristic detective romance about a 'Prussian Conspiracy.'

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#### To a Greek Girl.

With breath of thyme and bees that hum,  
Across the years you seem to come,—  
Across the years with nymph-like head,  
And wind-blown brows unfilleted:  
A girlish shape that slips the bud  
In lines of unspoiled symmetry:  
A girlish shape that stirs the blood  
With pulse of spring, Autonoe!

Where'er you pass—where'er you go,  
I hear the pebbly rillet flow;  
Where'er you go,—where'er you pass,  
There comes a gladness on the grass;  
You bring blithe airs where'er you tread,—  
Blithe airs that blow from down and sea;  
You wake in me a Pan not dead,—  
Not wholly dead!—Autonoe!

How sweet with you on some green sod  
To watch the rustic garden god;  
How sweet beneath the chestnut's shade  
With you to weave a basket braid;  
To watch across the stricken chords  
Your rosy-twinkling fingers flee;  
To woo you in soft woodland words,  
With woodland pipe, Autonoe!

In vain,—in vain! The years divide:  
Where Themis rolls a murky tide,  
I sit and fill my painful reams,  
And see you only in my dreams;—  
A vision, like Alcestris, brought  
From under-lands of Memory,—  
A dream of Form in days of Thought,—  
A dream,—a dream, Autonoe!

AUSTIN DOBSON.

An office building entirely for women is a project of the Kansas City Women's Commercial Club. It is expected to cost about \$150,000, and so varied will be the feminine lines of business housed there that it is expected to rival a big department store in the gentle art of attracting women to spend time and money.—[The American Club Woman.

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