

CHAPTER VII

MILITARISM AND ITS NEMESIS

THOSE who have considered the facts briefly set out in the foregoing chapters can hardly fail to agree that if European society could form a clear idea, not only of the military character, but also of the social and economic consequences of a future war under present conditions, protests against the present state of things would be expressed more often and more determinedly. But it cannot be affirmed that even this would bring about an amelioration of the present state of affairs. In all countries, with the exception of England, the opinion obtains that great armies are the support of government, that only great armies will deliver the existing order from the perils of anarchism, and that military service acts beneficently on the masses by teaching discipline, obedience and order.

But this theory of the disciplinary influence of military service is overthrown by the fact that, notwithstanding conscription, anarchism constantly spreads among the peoples of the West. It even seems that by teaching the use of arms to the masses, conscription is a far weaker guarantee than the long service of the professional soldier.

But the views of those interested in the present order do not extend so far, and are generally limited by considerations of safety at the present time. This safety the propertied classes see in large armies. As concerns the views of other orders of society, views which are expressed openly and constitute the so-called public opinion, these are too often founded only on those facts

to which accident gives prominence. The public does not investigate and does not test independently, but easily gives itself up to illusions and errors. Such, for instance, is the conception of great armies, not only as guarantors of security, but even as existing for the encouragement of those industries which equip them, and those trades which supply them, with provisions and other necessities.

It must be admitted that to decide the question whether militarism is inevitable or not is no easy task. We constantly hear the argument adduced, that there always have been wars and always will be, and if in the course of all the centuries recorded in history, international disputes were settled only by means of war, how can it be possible to get along without it in the future? To this we might reply that not only the number, equipment, training, and technical methods of armies, but the very elements from which they are constructed have essentially changed.

The relations of the strength of armies in time of war to their strength in time of peace in former times was very different. Wars formerly were carried on by standing armies consisting mainly of long service soldiers. The armies employed in future wars will be composed mainly of soldiers taken directly from peaceful occupations. Among the older soldiers will be vast numbers of heads of families torn from their homes, their families and their work. The economic life of whole peoples will stand still, communications will be cut, and if war be prolonged over the greater part of a year, general bankruptcy, with famine and all its worst consequences, will ensue. To cast light on the nature of a prolonged war from all sides, military knowledge alone is not enough. The study and knowledge of economic laws and conditions which have no direct connection with military specialism is no less essential.

Consideration of the question is made all the more difficult by the fact that the direction of military affairs belongs to the privileged ranks of society. The opinions expressed by non-specialists as to the improbability of great wars in the future, are refuted by authorities simply

by the declaration that laymen are ignorant of the subject. Military men cannot admit to be unnecessary that which forms the object of their activity in time of peace. They have been educated on the history of warfare, and practical work develops in them energy and capacity for self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, such authorities are not in a position to paint a complete picture of the disasters of a future war. Those radical changes which have taken place in the military art, in the composition of armies, and in international economy, are so vast that a powerful imagination would be required adequately to depict the consequences of war, both on the field of battle and in the lives of peoples.

Yet it cannot be denied that popular discontent with the present condition of affairs is becoming more and more keenly noticeable. Formerly only solitary voices were raised against militarism, and their protests were platonic. But since the adoption of conscription the interests of the army have been more closely bound with the interests of society, and the disasters which must be expected under modern conditions have been better appreciated by the people.

It is impossible, therefore, not to foresee the constant growth of the anti-military propaganda, the moral foundations of which were not so indisputable in the past as they are to-day. To this moral sentiment has lately been added a consciousness of the complexity of the business relations threatened by war, of the immense increase of means of destruction, and of the deficiency of experienced leadership and the ignorance and cloudiness now prevailing on the subject of war.

All these tend to make the people see in war a misfortune truly terrifying. And if, even in the past, it was found that the sentiments of peoples are more powerful than any force, how much more so now, when in the majority of states the masses indirectly share in the government, and when everywhere exist strong tendencies threatening the whole social order. How much more significant now are the opinions of the people both directly

as to the system of militarism and in their influence on the spirit of armies themselves!

It is impossible here even to outline the energetic struggle against militarism which is being carried on in the West. It is true that the advocates of the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means have not attained any tangible success. But success, it must be admitted, they have had if the fact is taken into account that the necessity of maintaining peace has been recognised by governments, and that dread of the terrible disasters of war has been openly expressed by statesmen, and emphasised even from the height of thrones.

As a chief factor tending to preserve the system of militarism the existence of a professional military class must be considered. It is true, that the changes which have taken place under the influence of conscription and short service have given to armies a popular character. On the mobilisation of armies a considerable proportion of officers will be taken from the reserve: these officers cannot be considered professional. Nevertheless, a military professional class continues to exist, consisting mainly of officers serving with the colours.

It is natural that the existence of such a numerous and influential class, which—in Prussia, for instance—is partly hereditary, a class in which are found many men of high culture, should be one of the elements supporting the system of militarism, even independently of its other foundations. Even if the conviction were generally accepted that it is impossible to carry on war with modern methods of destruction and in view of the inevitable disasters, yet disarmament would be somewhat delayed by the existence of the military caste, which would continue to declare that war is inevitable, and that even the decrease of standing armies would be accompanied by the greatest dangers.

It must be admitted that from the nature of modern life, the power and influence of this class will tend to decrease rather than increase. The conditions of war are such that military life is much less attractive than it

was of old, and in the course of a few years will be even less attractive. In the far past the military class preponderated in the state and the very nobility, as in Rome, and at the beginning of the Middle Ages was formed of knights (Equites, Ritter, Chevaliers). The carrying on of constant wars in the period embraced by modern history created anew a military profession enjoying a privileged position.

But changes which have taken place in political and social conditions, the increased importance of knowledge, industry, capital, and finally, the immense numbers of the military class, considerably reduced its privileges in society. Rivalry in the acquisition of means for the satisfaction of more complex requirements has caused the majority of educated people to see in military service an ungrateful career. And, indeed, there is no other form of exacting activity which pays so badly as the military profession. Owing to the immense growth of armies, governments cannot find the means for improving the position of officers and their families, and a deficiency in officers is everywhere felt.

Thus, insufficient recompense will inevitably result in the military profession losing all its best forces, all the more so because the fascination for society of persons bearing arms has departed. The movement against militarism leads to views diametrically opposite. Modern ideals every day see less to sympathise with in the old ideals of distinction in battle, and glory of conquest. Everywhere the idea spreads that the efforts of all ought to be devoted to the lessening of the sum of physical and moral suffering. The immense expenditure on the maintenance of armies and fleets and the building and equipment of fortresses, acts powerfully in the spreading of such sentiments. Everywhere we hear complaints that militarism sucks the blood of all—as it has been expressed, “in place of ears of corn the fields produce bayonets and sabres, and shells instead of fruit grow on the trees.” Those who adopt the military career are, of course, not responsible for these conditions, which they did not create

and which react injuriously on themselves. But popular movements do not analyse motives, and discontent with militarism is inevitably transferred to the military class.

It might be replied that scholars, too, are often ill rewarded, notwithstanding which they continue their work. But every scholar is sustained by the high interests of his work, by the hope of perpetuating his name, and finally, by the chance of enriching himself upon success. The position of officers is very different. For an insignificant salary they bear the burden of a petty and monotonous work. Year after year the same labour continues. Hope of distinction in war is not, for none believe in the nearness of war. For an officer with an average education the limit of ambition is the command of a company. The command of a battalion little improves his position. For the command of regiments and larger bodies of troops, academical education is required.

But even among those officers who console themselves with the thought that war will break out, presenting occasion for distinction, there is little hope of attaining the desired promotion. We have had many opportunities for conversing with military men of different nationalities, and everywhere we were met with the conviction that in a future war few would escape. With a smokeless field of battle, accuracy of fire, the necessity for showing example to the rank and file, and the rule of killing off all the officers first, there is but little chance of returning home uninjured.

The times are passed when officers rushing on in advance led their men in a bold charge against the enemy, or when squadrons seeing an ill-defended battery galloped up to it, sabred the gunners, and spiked the guns or flung them into ditches. Courage now is required no less than before, but this is the courage of restraint and self-sacrifice and no longer scenic heroism. War has taken a character more mechanical than knightly. Personal initiative is required not less than before, but it is no longer visible to all.

It is true that warfare and the military profession will

continue to preserve their attractions for such restless, uncurbed natures as cannot reconcile themselves to a laborious and regular life, finding a charm in danger itself. But even these will find that the stormy military life and feverish activity of battle are no more surrounded by the aureole which once set them above the world of work.

It is notable that the younger and the better educated they are, the more pessimistically do officers look on war. And although military men do not speak against warfare publicly, for this would be incompatible with their calling, it cannot escape attention that every year fewer and fewer stand up in defence of its necessity or use.

As the popularity of war decreases on all sides, it is impossible not to foresee that a time will approach when European governments can no longer rely on the regular payment of taxes for the covering of military expenditure. The extraordinary resource which has been opened by means of conversion of loans—that is, by the lowering of the rate of interest—will soon disappear. In 1894 a sum of five hundred and twenty millions of pounds sterling was converted, meaning for the proprietors of the securities, a loss of four millions seven hundred and sixty thousand of pounds. To defend themselves against this, capitalists have rushed into industry. In Europe, in recent times, industrial undertakings have immensely increased, and a vast number of joint-stock companies has been formed. The Conservative classes, considered as the best support of authority, foreseeing the loss of income, dispose of their Government securities and invest in industrial securities, which bring a better dividend. State securities tend to fall more and more into the hands of the middle classes—that is, the classes which live on incomes derived from work, but who are nevertheless in a position to save.

These changes tend to make the economic convulsions caused by war far greater than those which have been experienced in the past. The fall in the value of Government securities at the very time when, owing to the stoppage of work, many will be compelled to realise, must cause

losses which will be intensely felt by the middle classes and cause a panic. And, as out of the number of industrial undertakings some must reduce their production and lose their profit and others altogether cease to work, the richer classes will suffer great losses and many even ruin.

A detailed examination of the vexed questions of Europe would lead to the conclusion that not one is of such a nature to cause a great war. France has no ally in an offensive war for the recovery of her lost provinces, and single-handed she cannot be assured of success. From an offensive war over the Eastern question neither Russia nor Austria could draw compensatory advantages, and such a war, which in all probability would involve the participation of England, France, Germany and Italy, would lead only to exhaustion of forces. Germany cannot think of attacking France, while out of an offensive war with Russia she could draw no profit.

Of new territory in the West, Russia also has no need, and a war with Germany would involve such immense expenditure as could hardly be covered by an indemnity, all the more so because, exhausted as she would be by a struggle with Russia, Germany could not pay an indemnity corresponding to the case. Generally, the political question for Russia lies in the Far East and not in the West.

As concerns other possible pretexts for war, examination would show that, in the present conditions of Europe, none are of sufficient gravity to cause a war threatening the combatants with mutual annihilation or complete exhaustion, nor need those moral misunderstandings and rivalries which exist between European states be seriously considered. It cannot be supposed that nations would determine to exterminate one another merely to show their superiority, or to avenge offences committed by individuals belonging to one nation against individuals belonging to another. Thus a consideration of all the reasonable causes of war would show that not one was probable.

But even if peace were assured for an indefinite time, the very preparations made, the maintenance of armed

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forces, and constant rearmaments, would require every year still greater and greater sacrifices. Yet every day new needs arise and old needs are made clearer to the popular mind. These needs remain unsatisfied, though the burden of taxation continually grows. And the recognition of these evils by the people constitutes a serious danger for the state.

In our time both military and political affairs have ceased to be high mysteries accessible only to the few. General military service, the spread of education, and wide publicity have made the elements of the politics of states accessible to all. All who have passed through the ranks of an army have recognised that with modern weapons whole corps and squadrons may be destroyed in the first battle, and that in this respect the conquerors will suffer little less than the conquered.

Can it be possible that the growth of expenditure on armaments will continue for ever? To the inventiveness of the human mind and the rivalry between states no limits exist. It is not surprising therefore that the immense expenditure on military aims and the consequent growth of taxation are the favourite arguments of agitators, who declare that the institutions of the Middle Ages—when from thousands of castles armed knights pounced upon passing merchants—were less burdensome than modern preparations for war.

The exact disposition of the masses in relation to armaments is shown by the increase in the number of opponents of militarism and preachers of the Socialist propaganda. In Germany in 1893, the opponents of the new military project received 1,097,000 votes more than its supporters. Between 1887 and 1893 the opposition against militarism increased more than seven times. In France the Socialist party in 1893 received 600,000 votes, and in 1896 1,000,000.

Thus, if the present conditions continue, there can be but two alternatives, either ruin from the continuance of the armed peace, or a veritable catastrophe from war.

The question is naturally asked : What will be given to

the people after war as compensation for their immense losses? The conquered certainly will be too exhausted to pay any money indemnity, and compensation must be taken by the retention of frontier territories which will be so impoverished by war that their acquisition will be a loss rather than a gain.

With such conditions can we hope for good sense among millions of men when but a handful of their former officers remain? Will the armies of Western Europe, where the Socialist propaganda has already spread among the masses, allow themselves to be disarmed, and if not, must we not expect even greater disasters than those which marked the short-lived triumph of the Paris Commune? The longer the present position of affairs continues the greater is the probability of such convulsions after the close of a great war. It cannot be denied that conscription, by taking from productive occupations a greater number of men than the former conditions of service, has increased the popularity of subversive principles among the masses. Formerly only Socialists were known; now Anarchism has arisen. Not long ago the advocates of revolution were a handful; now they have their representatives in all parliaments, and every new election increases their number in Germany, in France, in Austria, and in Italy. It is a strange coincidence that only in England and in the United States, where conscription is unknown, are representative assemblies free from these elements of disintegration. Thus side by side with the growth of military burdens rise waves of popular discontent threatening a social revolution.

Such are the consequences of the so-called armed peace of Europe—slow destruction in consequence of expenditure on preparations for war, or swift destruction in the event of war—in both events convulsions in the social order.