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Posterity Will Not Hold Those Guiltless (Who Are Working For a Smash-up of National Govt.)

Asquith Stands To-day Between Us and Political Chaos--He is the Man of the Hour and Has the People With Him.

The greatest need of England to-day is peace—peace at home. The cackling of geese on one historic occasion saved ancient Rome, but the cackling and squabbling of politicians will not save the British Empire. I have not lost faith in Mr. Asquith. He is a great man and a great patriot, with a great gift of sound, comprehensive judgment, and as such admirably fitted to hold the balance as between the demands of our military chiefs and the requirements of our economic situation. Mr. Asquith stands between us and political chaos. That in itself is worth several army corps, for unity, like national solvency, is indispensable to victory. Those who are working for the break-up of the National Government are incurring a heavy responsibility, and posterity will not hold them guiltless if perchance disunion leads to disaster.

The Political Crisis.
The Cabinet crisis, which will probably have developed, subsided, or been postponed before these lines are read, is not, unfortunately, a good augury of an early termination of the war. If there were any solid grounds for expecting a collapse within the next few months our Ministers would not be quarrelling about the future supply of recruits. Mr. Lloyd George would not again be threatening to resign, and Colonel Winston Churchill, the stormy petrel of our politics, would not be back again on the front Opposition bench. It is proverbially said to be dangerous to swap horses in midstream; but, at the same time, nobody would propose such a thing if all danger were past. Whether or not Mr. Asquith's Ministry will go, to be succeeded by a new "giraffe" Coalition Government, headed by Mr. Lloyd George, with Winston, the pushful, as his right-hand man, and perhaps Fisher back again at the Admiralty, it is impossible to say; but the bare possibility of such a change just now shows that there are a good many more streams to be crossed before the Allied armies reach the Spree, or which proudly stands the capital of the Huns.

What the Dutchmen Think.
But although peace—international peace—in my opinion is not yet on the way I don't think it is at all strange that Amsterdam should report that the question of ending hostilities is being discussed with increasing persistence in the commercial circles of Holland which are of course, in close touch with the military and economic position in Germany and Austria. Gradually, but perhaps only very gradually, things in those countries must be going from bad to worse. While the enemy fails to obtain anything like a decisive victory at any point, East or West—while, indeed, Verdun follows Erzerum, and the fall of Trebizond heralds the approaching end of the Turkish Empire—there is no doubt that bereavement, anxiety, and scarcity are wearing down the spirit of resistance in the civil population of the Central Empires, and creating a condition of war weariness which, sooner or later, may reconcile the people to the downfall of the Hohenzollern and the Hapsburg dynasties, and the total destruction, as Mr. Asquith has it, of the military caste, whose riotous ambition was the cause of the war. To that it must come, and the sooner the better. But, Dutch opinion notwithstanding, it will not be yet awhile.

The Toll of War.
The very god of war must surely be getting satiated with the orgies of the battlefields during the past twenty months. A Washington authority estimates that the total casualties up to the end of last year were over 12,000,000, of which Russia has suffered 5,000,000, including 1,000,000 killed; France, 2,000,000, including 800,000 killed; Germany 2,500,000, including 580,000 killed; Austria-Hungary 2,000,000; and Great Britain 620,000. The cost in money is put down at £7,900,000,000, while naval losses include 170 vessels of war, with a total tonnage of 645,000. To these staggering figures must be added those of the past three months, which embraces the ghastly losses at Verdun, and those in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. Every belligerent country is feeling the strain in men and money, but, with the certainty of Nature's laws, the stronger of the two combinations must prevail in the end; and until that end comes, the cry for peace will be raised in vain.

An American Message.
In the meantime what are the prospects of our obtaining fresh allies? The Dutch scare has evaporated, Rou-

mania is still hanging fire, but Cousin Jonathan is talking big, and appears to be meaning business at last—at any rate, to the extent of breaking off relations—if Germany does not cave in as regards her submarine piracy. That all the best and most intellectual people in the States, from New York to San Francisco, are with us in their sympathies and prayers has been strikingly shown by the message which has just come across the Atlantic, signed by 500 leaders of American thought, including nearly all the eminent men of the new world, and even some of German blood. American politicians, educationists, bishops, judges, lawyers, and writers—all, in fact, who have an opportunity of arriving at a clear and independent judgment on the issues at stake—are agreed that, even on the evidence offered by the Germans themselves, the interests of humanity and of Germany herself demand the defeat of the Central Empires. Such a manifesto has a deep moral significance, full of hope for the future of civilization, and it will be remembered for ever to the credit of the great Western Republic.

Plucking the Eagle.
But what will Wilson do? Has he any real intention to fight for the rights of his countrymen at sea, or is he thinking only of his coming tussle with the bellicose Roosevelt for the Presidency? He has given orders for the overhauling of the Navy, which the Kaiser will at once pronounce to be contemptible, because lacking his own millions. Is all this and all the clever Note-writing which has been going on ever since the sinking of the Lusitania mere window-dressing for electioneering purposes? The old dodge in American politics was to twist the British Lion's tail, for, in other words, to give "sass" to England, but to-day that won't work and I should not be surprised if America's only share in the war turned out to be a mere competition between Wilson

The Dangers From Floating Mines

German submarines and minelayers place an estimated number of 1,000 mines each month in the waters of the entente allies. The question as to what becomes of the majority—those which do not accomplish the object for which they were planted—is dealt with interestingly in a report prepared by Rear Admiral Degouty, after a careful calculation which includes figures as to the mine-carrying capacity of submarines, the number of voyages of submarines and mine-layers, and the number of mines located and destroyed. Admiral Degouty believes that the presence of these engines of destruction will be formidable danger for ships for several years after peace comes.

"Quantities of mines," this naval official declares, "are carried away from their anchorage by the currents into the wide ocean, perpetuating the danger, perhaps, but diminishing immediate risks; quantities of others drift ashore, where they are immediately made harmless. The fishermen, whether they like it or not, and often to their great peril, capture a great number in their nets.

Adjustment Complicated.
"The adjustment of the exploding apparatus of the mine is not so simple, and its apparatus for stability at the proper depth doesn't always work. To produce its full effect, the mine must be held at a depth of three to five yards. If the stabilizing apparatus doesn't work it will descend too deeply or will come to the surface, where it will be readily discovered and destroyed. Where no stabilizing apparatus is used, floaters are required, and they, also, are easily discovered by good observers. Moreover, mines too close to the surface have not the maximum destructive effect.

"Notwithstanding the conditions that reduce to very small proportions the mines that really explode out of the 12,000 laid each year, they constitute a formidable danger that will not disappear for several years after the war is over. All the mines that drift to sea risk some day or other encountering a ship. Such accidents have already occurred, as in the case of the French battleship Bouvet, destroyed by a drifting mine at the Dardanelles.

"The logical defense against the sowing of mines broadcast would be to go to the origin of the evil—to strike the Germans in their ports—demolish their pirate nests and blockade their coasts so closely no minelayer could pass. The allies, however, have adopted a plan of action that particular circumstances have dictated that is probably the most effective possible, in spite of logical speculations that might indicate the contrary. History alone can decide between the partisans of an active and an expectative attitude.

"As to the floating mines set adrift in contradiction to the conventions of The Hague, it would be well to watch more closely every supposed 'neutral' cargo boat coming from Northern European waters, crossing the waters of the entente Powers or touching at their ports. Many mines, also, at high tide and with the aid of properly arranged nets may be drawn into some of the streams flowing into the sea."

and Roosevelt in the new game of plucking the Germans Eagle's feathers for the delectation of American Jingoists with votes to cast.

The Real Patriotism.
Speculation, however, is unprofitable. What we have got to do is to go straight on with our job, whether others lend a hand or not, and to strain every nerve to attain the maximum of efficiency on land, on sea, and in the air. The questions of after-service administration and of recruiting ought, as I have said, to be settled without setting the nation by the ears, or rousing labour to rebellion, or imperiling our economic strength; and the public, who have little or no data on which to form a sound judgment, will expect our politicians and experts to forgo all personal ambitions and the joys of sectional triumph, in order that England's right arm may be strong, that her armour may be flawless, and her great heart may be untroubled as she goes forth to mortal combat.

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