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THE CRAZY ANTICS OF NERO WERE MERE CHILD'S PLAY COMPARED WITH THE CALLOUS ATTITUDE OF WILLIAM OF HOHENZOLLERN

By MARIE CORELLI.

IN every great national crisis, when war or revolution brings havoc on existing civilization and works sudden and violent change in all social, political, and diplomatic relations, we are invariably able to discover one man—or at the most perhaps two or three men—primarily responsible for the general upheaval.

History is impressively explicit concerning these personages. She never fails to show us how, by some strange lack of the most ordinary foresight and common sense, they stumble when apparently on the height of success, and commit irreparable blunders which hasten their careers to a disastrous close. Such was the case with Napoleon and many other would-be Alexanders of ambition; but of all the tragic blunderers of time surely none can equal or surpass the "War Lord" of Germany. Here is a man who had the splendid chance of securing for his country and people the largest share of the commerce of Europe; it lay easily within his grasp. Yet he has let it go like a handful of sand and shells dropped by a child at play on the seashore. To satisfy the personal cravings of a vaunting, blustering egotism for blood-and-thunder "effects" he has lost the peaceful conquest of a world!

Amazing, deplorable, and incredible folly!—when such conquests could have been gained without a blow, without the boom of a single gun, without the explosion of a single shell! It could have been attained in the only way by which any truly "civilized" nation should ever seek supremacy—through the development of industry and commerce, and the quiet assumption of the power that industry and commerce give. All that we call "progress" should fortify the stand of human resolution on this basis. It is not necessary, it is not even sane or decent that any people should tolerate what Carlyle describes as "the spectacle of men with clenched teeth and hell-fire eyes hacking one another's flesh, converting precious living bodies and priceless living souls into nameless masses of putrescence, useful only for turpentine"—which is a rough but accurate picture of war deprived of all its devilish excitement and glamour.

To Kaiser Wilhelm more than to any other monarch of his line was given the glorious choice of becoming the greatest benefactor of Germany which that realm had ever known. He could have created for his people such conditions of peace, happiness, and prosperity as were almost incalculable. He stood in the broad sunshine of ripening trade—the markets of the world were open to him—fields of wealth were spreading around him on all sides, and his cheerfully working millions had but to reap the grain their industries had sown and gather in a rich and plentiful harvest. Why, then, in the name of all that is great, noble, and pitiful, has he chosen to make a harvest of death instead of life?

During the grim and ghastly struggle at Verdun we are told the Kaiser, standing "at safe distance," watched through his field glasses the fiery mowing down of his countrymen to the number of 45,000! Does any one reading this, take the trouble to pause and consider what it means? Forty-five thousand strong brave men in the flower of manhood (for let us hope we are none of us so unjust as to deny our enemies their strength or their courage), 45,000 capable human beings fit for every sort of industrial labor—the blood and bone of future generations—slaughtered like vermin; and their Emperor, their sworn defender and protector, within sight-range, looking on!

What a "Harvest Home"! Are we able to conceive the nature and temperament of a monarch who could so look on at this massacre of his subjects and not rush among them to stop the advance of their serried ranks and "massed formations," resulting in such a wanton and wicked waste of life! The crazy antics of Nero were mere child's play compared with this callous attitude of William of Hohenzollern, an attitude which even his French foes cannot maintain. For, fired with vengeance for old wrongs as they are, and bent on victorious justice, they have declared themselves "sick with slaughter."

"Such hecatombs," writes Colonel Rousset, "cannot last." Our adversary, while carrying his disregard of human life to the point of madness, cannot go on throwing his soldiers into the channel house without thinking of tomorrow.

The losses of the Germans at Verdun have been estimated at 10,000 per day! "I dream at night," writes one French artillery officer, "of those ghastly crumpled heaps of shattered gray-green bodies! Germany's wives and mothers must curse the Kaiser in their prayers!"

Voltaire is accredited with the saying that "the only crime is stupidity." According to this dictum, one must come to consider the "All-Highest War Lord" the greatest criminal of an epoch, his stupidity being almost without parallel in history. What man, not entirely mad, seeing a world of prosperity within reach of his hand, would clench his fist and knock the whole splendid sphere away from him at one blow! The proposition seems absurd and untenable, yet it has been and continues to be the Kaiser's policy, or the policy of his Ministers and advisers; clear to all save those who remain perversely and willfully blind.

For it is not too much to say that before the war Germany was pushing quietly but surely through every branch of commerce. From triumph to triumph she moved easily onward; everywhere her ramifications were spreading like the vigorous roots of a fast-growing tree. In Great Britain she had possessed herself of many of our trades; her goods were everywhere; her cutlery, her glass, her woollens, her linens, her dyes, her silver and copper ware, her chemicals—why, even our very window frames were "made in Germany"! She was at work in our mines and coal fields; she was ahead of us in science, in invention, in industry, and general "thoroughness."

And let us not forget that we were or appeared to be, supinely indifferent to her inroads on all that we used to claim as our "special line" and particular property! We were, like Hamlet, "growing fat and scant of breath." We were disposed to indulge once and self-indulgence, and when we saw Germans working for us, and by us, and through us, taking the very tools out of our listless hands, we were agreeably convinced that they saved us a deal of trouble. They worked so cheaply, too!—and cheapness in necessary goods appealed to us, because it gave us more to spend on racing and football. The "space for special news" in our press was not reserved (as intelligent foreigners conceived it ought to be) for serious information on world's business but for "Football Results" or cricket in the respective seasons of these gamesome athletics—and the very word "patriotism" was laughed out of court as "jingoism." We gave the honors of heroes to our tennis champions, and played about while the Germans worked. They worked—as many of the British refused to work they saved—as many of the British declined to save; they gained their ends, because by our very inertia we gave them every opportunity to do so.

Mr. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia, said in a recent speech that Germany "had abused our foolishly generous hospitality." This is not quite accurate, since we were neither so generous nor hospitable as careless and lazy. We allowed our trades to slip through our fingers—the State did nothing for native work, science, or invention—and ambitious men of hope and endeavor left the country in shoals to make fortunes in other lands many firms establishing themselves in Germany in order to win the rewards denied them in their native home!

Germany held a more tenacious grip on every corner of the earth than we in our latter "go-as-you-please" way ever realized. All over the United States, Canada, and Australia her people have spread; you find them in India, in Persia, in Egypt, in Africa; as a matter of fact, there is no country where German influence has not been actively at work while other nations looked on. Antwerp itself was well-nigh possessed by German commerce before its military bombardment; it was already a centre of German trade and German shipping, and in many of its business houses more German was spoken than either French or Flemish. Great Britain was lagging behind in the race; and had peace been maintained for another twenty-five years Germany might easily have mastered the world; and we might have lost all leading hold on commerce.

For let us not delude ourselves on the subject of our own inertia! It is owing to the magnificent stand made for justice and right by the hero King of Belgium that we have been awakened from long apathy; had it not

been for his resolute example, both France and Britain would have suffered far more than they are suffering now! Friend and defender of both nations, he stands out as the noblest figure in the struggle—the one who, when victory sits upon our helm, must be the first to receive that which is due to him—the restoration of his country and his throne.

And now the rivers of gold that were flowing into Germany through her trade are replaced by mountains of British, French, and German dead! The latest estimate of German losses at Verdun is 200,000! Does the Kaiser at safe distance, still "look on"? What blessing has this monarch of a great and productive realm brought upon his people? Mourning, desolation, and irremediable misery! No triumph, no victory can atone for such a deluge of blood and tears! That capricious Personage "somewhere in Heaven," whom Wilhelm calls "Unser Gott," may possibly resent the deliberate casting away of golden opportunities on the part of his crowned earthly "familiar," to whom a peaceful world was offered, only to be kicked aside for a battered helmet and broken sword!

"Trust in thy sickle and reap!" O Emperor of a brief and bitter day! The harvest of death, not life!—the harvest of curses, not blessings! The thousands of dead men—dead in the very strength of manhood—sacrificed in a holocaust on the flaming altar of the wickedest war the world has ever seen, may have their own story to tell to "Unser Gott"; so may the bereaved and wretched women whose husbands and sons have been torn from their arms forever. May the true God help them all!—for in the insupportable hell of iniquity around us man is well-nigh powerless; though, like every evil thing, war has its good side. It shows us with each day heroism of the finest, courage of the strongest, self-sacrifice of the noblest existing among us all; and it has reawakened the higher spirit of Britain. For this we have cause to be devoutly thankful! In a certain sense it has saved us from ourselves and from the enervating love of pleasure and personal avarice which was slowly undermining our better qualities.

And even the Kaiser, "looking on" at the legions of his own subjects falling like withered leaves in a whirlwind of fire, may one day shake off his rezzed nightmare of battle, and reënt—exclaiming like Judas: "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!"

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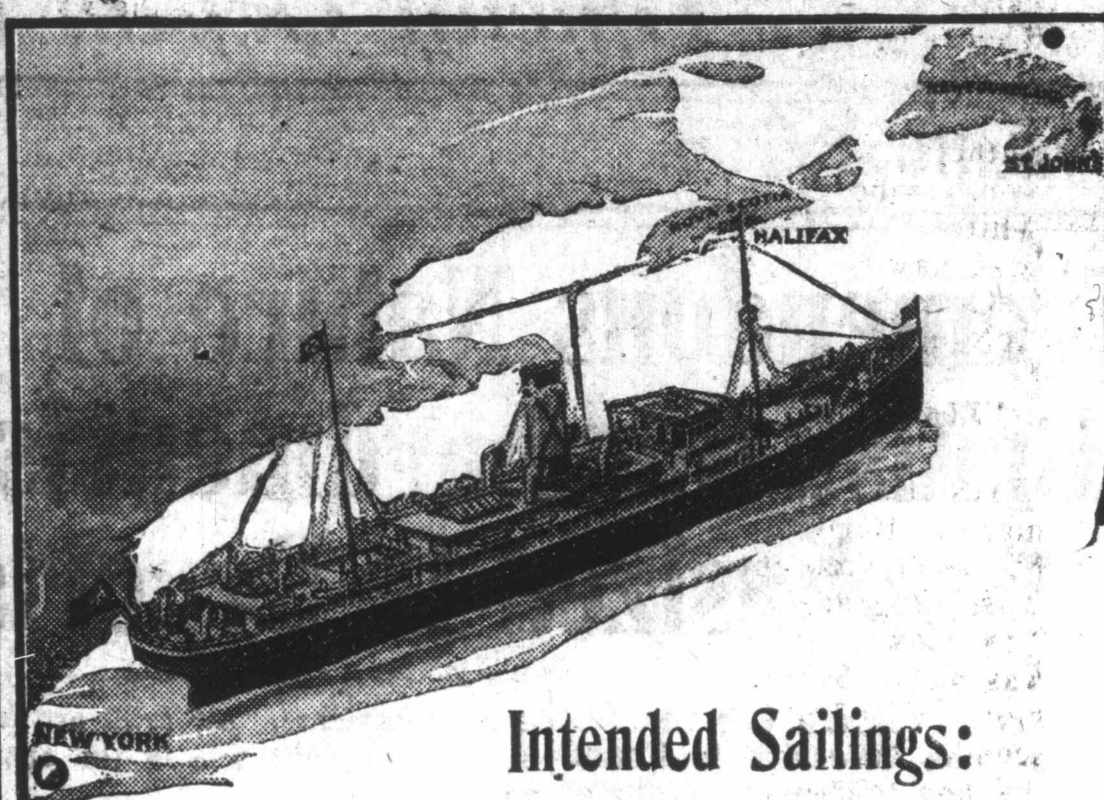
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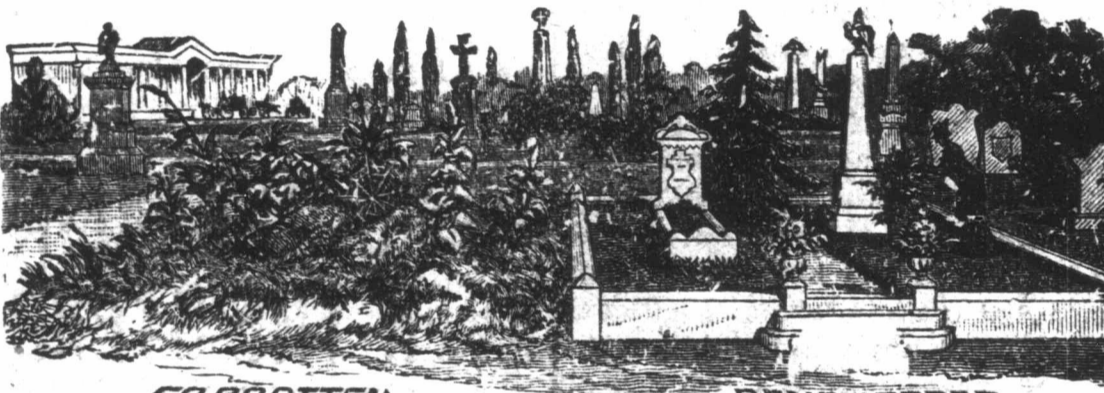
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