

The War Lords

A Glimpse at a Book that all the World is Reading

BY J. A. STEVENSON



Lloyd George is a hustler himself, and he is making the munition workers hustle, too.

A. G. Gardiner, editor of the London Daily News, is gifted with an amazing brilliance of touch for pen portraits of celebrated men. His two first essays in this art "Prophets, Priests and Kings" and "Pillars of Society," achieved great success, being sold in thousands, and now he has produced a third series entitled "The War Lords." Some of the subjects had been sketched in the two previous books, but the majority are figures whom the war has brought into world-wide prominence. The latest book is in no way inferior to its predecessors and deserves wide perusal. Mr. Gardiner, staunch democrat and ardent reformer as he is, uses his sketches in the most skilful manner as media for the support of progressive theories and weaves brilliant expositions of sound political principles into the account of each personality in turn.

The Kaiser's Vision

Naturally, he begins with the Kaiser and attributes most of that individual's failings to the "divine right" theories which he holds. One note, the divinity of his kingship, runs thru all his speeches and Mr. Gardiner believes that his political doctrine gave his actions a definite and fatal direction. War was not perhaps his deliberate purpose, but it was its destiny. The Kaiser believes himself to be the appointed instrument of God, with a divine mission to force a particular brand of civilization — the German — upon the world. This vision governs his conception of the state and its relation to the people. In his eyes, the State is his family property to be administered justly, but with immunity from criticism or attack and the weapon of government is the army, available to destroy both internal and external enemies.

Like many other critics, Mr. Gardiner believes that the war was made chiefly to avert impending revolution and change in Germany; the alternative to democratic freedom at home was the policy of the mailed fist abroad, and the Bismarckian tradition of success in foreign wars, "the curse of Bismarck" Mr. Gardiner calls it, lured the people to follow him in his mad course. Fair-minded Liberal tho Mr. Gardiner is, he thinks that when the Allies prevail, some of the German leaders chiefly responsible for the many crimes against humanity admitted by their troops, should be tried as common criminals.

Belgians' Noble King

King Albert is depicted as the ideal democratic king, a true leader of his people and the finest figure in the whole war. Then follows a brilliant account of the Asquith Cabinets and the spirit of England. He describes in vivid

words the fateful scenes in the House of Commons in the early days of August, 1914, when the storm came up and the British Liberals and their allies saw the dreams of years shattered and the fruits of their courageous struggles slipping from their grasp. He sketches cleverly Mr. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey, Lloyd George and other Liberal ministers and advances to an estimate of their achievements since 1906. Then he treats briefly of the change to a coalition government and the new figures introduced. Lord Haldane's retirement he regards as the outstanding scandal connected with the new ministry. Be it remembered always that Lord Haldane re-fashioned the British army, made possible the immediate despatch of the expeditionary force and provided the Territorial machine, whose value has been so well proven. Mr. Gardiner considers the late Liberal government to have been the greatest that ever ruled the British Empire and a detailed review of the changes wrought under its guidance will be the subject of a later article.

The Soldiers

The military and naval figures of the day occupy the larger part of the rest of the book. General Joffre, who "talks less nonsense" than any man of his time, and is a "plain son of the mountains and the Republic's most loyal servant," the Grand Duke Nicholas, modest but authoritative, mystic at heart, but practical in his actions, the stern foe of corruption and master of the fighting retreat; Bernhardt, the intellectual militarist firebrand who unblushingly revealed the mind of the Junker caste and regarded the mass of the German people as hopelessly pacifist; old Hindenburg, the ablest general revealed by the war and well deserving of the adulations showered on him by his countrymen; and our own General French, who, despite a certain temperamental indolence, has the supreme quality of always being adequate to the occasion.

In Mr. Gardiner's eyes, commanders in battle are no longer personalities but abstractions: "Not a visible inspiration, but a thought working in some remote background, with maps, telephones, aeroplanes and wireless." General Joffre's greatness is shown in his appreciation of the new conditions and he is merely the reflection of a profound change in the spirit of France. Competent observers agree that of all countries engaged, France has shown up the best.



The Cave of Soissons, on the French front

Wonderful has been her freedom from excitement and alarms, her quiet gravity, as if steeled to endure the direst blows of fortune, yet no people hate the war so deeply and bitterly as the French, with their fine imagination and cultured instincts. France was the parent of liberty for the world and there is now a hope that she may once again blaze the trail for a brighter and fairer civilization than we have yet known, when the dark days are over.

Then we have chapters on Lord Fisher, the creator of the British dreadnought, who left office owing to his collision with Winston Churchill and who was chiefly responsible for the selection of Admiral Jellicoe as fighting head of the navy over many aggrieved seniors.

Mr. Gardiner claims for Lord Fisher a remarkable forecast that war with Germany would come in 1914. He made it when the first dreadnought was launched in 1905; its advent forced the reconstruction of the Kiel canal by the Germans, which took nine years. Jellicoe is the supreme embodiment of the new scientific spirit which has been developed in the British navy under Lord Fisher's inspiration. "Sir John Jellicoe," says Mr. Gardiner, "has a mind wedded to no antiquated assumptions, familiar with all the incalculable factors, quick to seize the meaning of every fact and correlate it with the strategic and technical requirements, in short—a mind mobile, modern, unprejudiced, which faces the unknown with the keenest vision, the most instructed judgment and the readiest accessibility to ideas."

Kings and Statesmen

The rest of the book is taken up with crowned heads and statesmen and the noble royalties Franz Joseph, King Ferdinand and the Crown Prince of Prussia receive scant treatment at the essayist's hands. The German Crown Prince is depicted as an insolent jingo and swash-buckler, who has disgraced even his sire and has made a series of gigantic failures in the field.

King Victor Emmanuel, of Italy, and King Nicholas of Montenegro, our allies, are accorded high praise for their democratic spirit and kindly virtues, but the neutral Gustav of Sweden is painted as a would-be autocrat in unseemly conflict with the enlightened sympathies and traditions of his people. Of the four statesmen written of, Venizelos, President Wilson, Karl Liebknecht and General Botha, the latter, who also ranks high as a general, is acclaimed as the British Empire's most useful servant and the opportunity is taken to point the moral of the success of British Liberalism in winning the allegiance of South Africa by generous concessions. President Wilson's neutrality is approved of with a few gentle sarcasms. Venizelos, ex-Premier of Greece, is described as the greatest statesman in Europe, an estimate which may require revision, and Karl Liebknecht, the leader of the German



General Joffre talks less nonsense than any man of his time

reads Mr. Gardiner's stern criticism of kings and his keen admiration for the devoted leaders of democracy, it is not difficult to discern his pre-dispositions and we can agree with him that conflicts between peoples invariably proceed from conflicts between kings, chancelleries and capitalists. Kant, in his "Perpetual Peace," declared that the ideal of peace could never be realized until the world had got rid of thrones and was organized on a democratic basis in every region. When we consider the spirit of France or Great Britain or even the neutral United States with the Central Empires, we can realize that it is not democracies who conceal eternal hates ready to burst into war, but over-weeningly ambitious monarchs and incompetent ministers who stumble into war in pursuance of their own selfish schemes.

There is much in the book that is hastily written and ephemeral and the essays do not deal primarily with character, but with the relation between men and events. As such, however, they develop lessons and truths which merit further exposition, particularly in relation to the future of Canada and the British Empire.

It is asserted in Amsterdam that two German generals, unnamed, have been dismissed from their commands as a result of the German setback in the West. The appointment of a new German commander-in-chief on the western front is hinted at, Field Marshal von Hindenburg's name being mentioned.

Holland has sent an emphatic protest to the German government concerning the passage of German aircraft over Dutch territory. Germany is asked to take adequate steps to prevent recurrences in the future.

The Russian Duma or Parliament will re-assemble on November 8 for action on the budget and financial affairs.