

# The Truth about the Treaty

*By*  
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*Foreword by*  
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## FOREWORD

There are others who may be able to write as accurately and as interestingly concerning events which led up to the World War and the war itself, but there is no Frenchman, save Clemenceau, who can write with so much authority concerning the Peace Treaty, signed at Versailles, June 28, 1919, as André Tardieu.

M. Tardieu gets nothing second-hand. He was a participant in the events of which he writes. As a member of the Chamber of Deputies, he knew the currents of French political life, and he can write understandingly of the causes leading up to the great conflict. As an officer in the French Army, he can speak authoritatively of that glorious page in history of which he was a part.

This training served him well when he was called to assume a foremost rôle in the making of the peace. No man worked with more tireless energy, and none had a better grasp of the delicate and complex problems brought before the Congress. He was not only invaluable to France, but to his associates from other countries as well. He was in all truth the one nearly indispensable man at the Conference.

Therefore, if one would know of those fateful days in Paris when the Allies of France had gathered from the ends of the earth to have their reckoning with the Central Powers, it would be well to read *The Truth about the Treaty*, for here it is told by him who knows.

EDWARD M. HOUSE.

New York, March 3, 1921.

## INTRODUCTION

My Dear Friend:

It was near your heart, in face of the virulent attacks on our Peace Treaty, to set up the *truth* in print.

If I applaud, it is not that I think there is need to defend the men who made it. For when all the criticism was in, nearly every candidate sought their endorsement before going to the polls. But what a misery to reduce to personal concern, the immensity of the interests at stake. Alas! Nothing is less easily forgiven than success,—above all when it touches your critic in a tender spot.

Shall I add that an exact notion of duty, coupled with the pride of responsibility borne in the war which the Treaty was to close in triumph, forbade us to bring into the negotiations men whose views we had thus far never shared. Hence, disappointments which sooner or later were to find tongue.

Then enforcement entrusted to new hands, in the midst of grave difficulties, opened the door to recrimination. You know the old saying: "It is a bad workman who blames his tools."

The common people were quick to see that violence in attack is not enough to redeem failures in time of stress. The deadly parallel was all that was needed to enlighten those whose least excuse was not always that they were blind.

That is why, dear friend, it cost me so little—I, who was looking on from the bank—to turn away from this turmoil, telling you the while that the nation—having seen how great the trial—would continue its confidence to those who had won it bravely and honestly.

You agreed with me. But you were in the *mêlée* and claiming the right and duty to defend our common cause, you justly thought that it became you and your comrades to stand and meet the eager horde of assailants. It is fair to say that you have not spared yourself. This book bears witness to that.

Without waiting for time to put all things in place, you

## INTRODUCTION

wanted even now to pave the way for the coming of justice. Well may you be proud. You have so well laid the ax—as Demosthenes would say—to the heart of the iron thicket that, before the battle is well joined, its fate is sealed.

Soon events—foreseen and unforeseen—were to bring to your support the weight of facts made vivid in the full light of day.

This book prompted by your bold heart is above all an act of real wisdom. For nothing presses more at all times than to light the path of our Democracy, if it is to be able to govern itself instead of merely substituting one abuse of power for another.

Parliament—Public Opinion! Because the supreme power theoretically rests with them, there is great need that the brushwood be cleared from around the things that are done with a reason.

Our institutions are the best in the world. To work them the best men in the world are none too good, above all if they are to be made of full effect.

Love of theory has perchance made us too exacting of our public bodies,—fallible because merely human. Tossed hither and yon, by honest conviction as well as by sordid interest, our “rulers,” at the mercy of the current, seek the fair way without always finding it. To aid them it is enough to bring them light—ever more light—and to be without pity for the things that hide. But mind you never wait. Be quick with the counter-thrust of contradiction. For the will of to-day, as Machiavelli says, is the nail on which to-morrow’s action hangs.

It is true. To maintain Parliament in the straight path of a power uncertain in its scope a free Press can be of decisive value. You have used it to wonderful purpose. And yet how comes it that in our democracies the Press leaves itself open to the suspicion that it shuts its eyes to more or less veiled attempts upon pure right? The Press has weapons enough for its defense.

Here—as a supreme safeguard—the inadequately prepared exercise of popular sovereignty finds its place. But for its thunder to be real and not of the stage, there is need for efficient preparation now lacking. If man always acted as he speaks, he would seem too near to God.

But as we now stand—rejoice thereat—when France really needs to make herself heard, I doubt not that she will do it with a loud voice.

In the matter of Versailles, any wide-spread misunderstanding

## INTRODUCTION

may have disastrous consequences before long. So you were more than right, dear friend, to wish that no excuse remain to those who, not having had things made plain to them, may try to feign that they do not understand. You have not left the least cloak to ignorance, not even excess of artlessness, if that fault can be imputed (especially in assemblies) to our day and generation.

Behold! You have done that which was near your heart, you have done it to the applause of all who are not deterred by private passion from the plain quest for the Truth.

The assailants have fallen back in disorder, some of them giving vent to exaggerations which brand them with their habitual discredit; others less bold who inspired them have completed the rout by the ostentatious appropriation of some of your own views.

How could I have doubted the issue, I who saw you in the days of sore trial bearing bravely—aye, even gaily—the heavy burden of your great responsibilities? Happy days when our opponents were those provided by the nature of things, days in which we gave for the victory of peace the same full measure of effort that war had demanded of us.

All around you, around your co-workers, there was a constant search for knowledge, a constant appeal to all sources of light. Each of you compiling, questioning, discussing, trying out on me and on others the strength of your arguments. You were preparing yourself by toil and labour for the arduous debates in which your splendid fighting spirit was met by gainsayers worthy of your cause as of their own. Ever ready for the fray, never down-hearted, ill-satisfied with a half success, ever seeking steel,—that is what I saw of these much abused negotiators.

In those days you did not foresee the bitter diatribes even then being whetted in silent pent-up rage by men too slow to discover that all agreements are reached by compromise, and that a war won by four could not end in a peace dictated by one alone. What would you? If some to think well of themselves need to think ill of others.

Perhaps what astonishes most is that so many famed opponents were forced to confine themselves to criticism of such or such an article, each seeking to outbid the other without ever having seemed to realize that the question as a whole—a question of political and social history—had to be taken up at the place where war had broken it off and followed along new lines of international unity to permit the Europe of the future to live and prosper.

## INTRODUCTION

When one confines the field of debate to suit one's convenience, it is easy to wallow in invective but hard to pretend to the understanding of a diplomatic instrument which, renewing as it does from the ground up, all questions of world policy, beggars description.

All these Treaties of Peace to which so many famous personages set their names, without in some cases having laboured on them overmuch, were studied, drafted, built up free from the supervision of the modern Argus, beneath the inspiration of a master whose decisions were lauded before he had made them.

Whatever resentment the Treaty of Versailles has aroused, at least no one has been able to say that its ratification was not obtained by full knowledge and consent.

The ancient struggles for domination had always, till then, been settled by conquests of territory. Germany victorious, the Treaty could be but a question of her capacity for deprecation. Germany vanquished, right resumed full sway and the victors were forced to disentangle themselves from the myriad difficulties that might had been unable to overcome. What an undertaking! And however incompletely realized, what audacity to have even attempted it!

The most irreconcilable opposition might have found there food for thought. It deemed it easier to raise its demand indiscriminately on all clauses, and then finally contented itself with a slackening of the terms we had succeeded in imposing. Where is this to end? I should have thought it inconceivable that a treaty could be enforced otherwise than by the fulfillment of the undertakings written in the bond.

Bernhardi it is who said that war is only the continuation of the pursuit of peace aims by other means. I can see in that nothing but the brutal assertion of a fact. After the awful war forced upon us, can our peace policy be other than the necessary sequel of the policy of forbearance which put all civilized peoples on our side the day that the Germans went so far as to try to do away with the right of France to live?

We have won this war not by our worth alone, but by the splendid aid of our trusty Allies. This asset must remain to us and we must give way a little on both sides in a spirit of friendship, not with ill temper that but lessens the price of consent and allows mortal hurts to subsist where agreement with good grace would have brought full measure of achievement.

## INTRODUCTION

Remember with what joy we hailed the sound of the first Allied gun. This does not mean that—after untold sacrifice made for ourselves assuredly but no less profitable to our associates who fought for their own salvation as well as for ours—we are reduced to submit meekly to the law of our friends. No! We did not save our just rights by war, to end by giving them up in peace.

But the past grips us still. Even at the moment of the Armistice, we could see arising here and there thoughts different indeed from those which filled our minds when, at Doullens or Abbeville, our whole energies bent on the next stand, we asked ourselves the dread question: Paris or Calais?

Waterloo and Sedan, to go back no further, forced upon us the painful care of a policy of reparation. While others filled with the hope of new things might allow themselves to be led away to the renewal of the past precautions against a France grown over-strong. There could be no greater folly. But is not the return to the past always the first impulse of countries whose power is founded upon the force of tradition?\*

Nothing is more significant in this respect than the book of Mr. Keynes—one of the representatives of Great Britain at the Conference of Paris. With some knowledge of economics but neither imagination nor character, Mr. Keynes (who was not alone in his opinion) unrelentingly opposed "the abusive exactions of the Allies" (read: of France and of her delegates whose most elementary demands prevailed only with great difficulty) in the name of an alleged regard for "the capabilities of Germany." One can imagine how Berlin welcomed the aid thus tendered. What encouragement for all organized German resistance to the Treaty, to read from the pen of a former British delegate that we had "*shamelessly exaggerated the claims of our devastated regions.*"

These reproaches and many others as brutally violent, of which I should have said nothing if their author without counting the cost had not thought to serve his cause by making them public, show clearly enough to what pitch certain minds had wrought themselves.

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\*A tiny instance can give some idea of the difficulties of agreement on all points. For France to obtain the right to subject to military service, for the exclusive defense of her own territory, the natives of the countries over which she obtained a mandate, it was necessary to assert the contrary principle and it was only at the end of a year that (see the texts) a right of interpretation was implicitly recognized to us which amounted to nothing less than the formal negation of the professed agreement. As to an express recognition, it was always energetically refused to us.



## INTRODUCTION

Perchance our French opponents will have the grace to see that we could not have both "betrayed" the Allies to the profit of France, as Mr. Keynes says; and France to the profit of the Allies as they themselves allege.

Without entering here into the consequences of theories of universal interdependence which, before any satisfaction had been given us, would afford the Germans the economic opportunity they need to resume their frustrated attempt at domination, I confine myself to noting that, though disapproved of by Mr. Keynes as excessive and by some Frenchmen as insufficient, the Treaty of Versailles is equally binding on all who signed it.

This is so true that our French opponents, after urging the Treaty's rejection or seeking to discredit it, have come by a sudden somersault, to demand the *rigorous enforcement* of the pact they so loudly condemned, holding their peace the while when they see its terms gradually slackened to our detriment, under German bluster.

I note the fact and none the less maintain according to Bernhardt himself that this Treaty, like all treaties, is and can only be a prolongation of war activities until complete fulfillment. This cannot be challenged unless it is desired—which no one has ever suggested—to wipe out the German defeat. Mr. Keynes himself does not go as far as that.

Our Allies must accept the facts. We are victorious by their aid. They are victorious by ours. And our common victory can only produce and maintain its full effect in peace by the continuation of our common undertakings.

It was not as warriors victorious in any ordinary military success that our soldiers appeared in the great war, that triumphal arch which—risen out of a great dream of domination now buried in the annals of history—gave passage at last to the standards of arms' noblest conquest—a peace of justice and of honour.

If I dare to say it, it was the glamour of hope in presence of the miracle of Waterloo reversed: Wellington coming to our aid to break the onslaught of Blücher; while France, by the side of America aroused, broke with the spirit of military hegemony which had passed from Napoleon to Bismarck and was to be forever crushed.

So many cruel mistakes, so many atrocious miseries, so many hopes frightfully blasted, the whole whoredom of man's past suffering stretched out under the gaze of the noble dead along an

## INTRODUCTION

avenue of heroic splendors blazing with the glory of France radiant and redeemed. And the men of France followed the lighted way towards the new duties of regenerated mankind.

However this peace of miracles remained to be fashioned with our hands, after we had seen it with our eyes. And for who was able to retain this vision, the miracle of the war won demanded an even greater miracle—the miracle of peace organized.

Alas, my dear Tardieu, the only certain miracles are those which we can ourselves perform. And if we would perform them, we must first get rid of that state of mind in which the past struggles instinctively in spite of ourselves to overcome the necessities of the present.

During the war, on the Fourth of July, the anniversary of American independence, as the United States troops paraded in front of the statue of Washington, Mr. Lloyd George said to me, smiling:

“Do you realize that you have made me assist in the celebration of England’s greatest defeat?”

“And if your national pride still makes you regret the defeat,” I answered, “I feel sure that you do not regret this day. What harm has come to you from this American independence which I see every day becoming more attractive to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, who have freely enlisted in the block of the four great Allies? There have been heavier accounts by far settled between your flag and mine. And yet it is with all my heart that every day I salute your flag at the front.”

Thus we taught each other the new spirit of the future while waiting for the work of applying it. Let us take care not to begin by weaknesses cloaked under acceptable names. Let us beware above all of the weaknesses of a policy of procrastination.

Our beaten enemies have admirable qualities of action which they employed, under a master, from Sadowa to Versailles, to the most relentless advantage. Scruples are utterly foreign to them as was made so clear by the recreant band of their ninety-three intellectuals and moral leaders. They thought to grasp the realization of a dream of atrocious brigandage in which victory would excuse every crime, and the probabilities are that they would have conquered us in peace but for the mad act which forced military resistance upon us. Are they any better than their acts? The future alone can tell, but the answer may be inferred from the acid test of actual beginnings.

## INTRODUCTION

The start was not a happy one with von Brockdorff-Rantzau who, draped in brutish insolence, came to accuse us of "hating" Germany because we did not offer our necks to her executioners. Since then the policy of Germany has merely been to gather up every chance weapon that could enable her to evade the Treaty. Audacity and guile naturally increased under the encouragement of manifestations like that of Mr. Keynes or of the series of unholy concessions from which Germany has been led to deduce that her signature at Versailles binds her only subject to further discussions.

The hour of supreme warning came when the heads of the Allied Governments were told to their faces by a German delegate that, before they could usefully discuss, they "must cure themselves of the sickness of victory." And the Conference didn't break up! And the disavowal of the delirious swine was not even demanded! At least may this true Boche receive our thanks for his shameless frankness which dispels any illusions about the German case.

So on which side is there continuity of purpose? On which side vacillation?

What people is it that, abased and divided, having touched the bottom of the abyss, and unable to conceive any other ideal than the abuse of force—the shattered remnants of which litter the earth—still finds within itself a rebound of warped "dignity"—of savage insolence to defy its victors and to prepare openly for a mad revenge which without saving it, will throw the world into a new catastrophe?

And what people is it that united for the victory of right, having displayed the highest virtues in the most extreme peril—have allowed themselves to be flouted with impunity by a prostrate foe—without any remedy being offered but exhortation to patience and kind promises that one day moral courage will come into its own?

And yet each day of dangerous tolerance increases the forces of evil, and snatches opportunities from the happy outcome so dearly bought. Can one have forgotten what was the stake between ourselves and Germany—what defeat would have cost us, and what peace must assure to us!

The crowning or the overthrow of all the hopes aroused by victory, that, after all, is the issue which is being decided before our very eyes. Must we perhaps to-morrow return to the bloody battles whose cycle broken by us may, by our weakness, be reformed against us?

## INTRODUCTION

The country made no mistake about it. Not for a single moment did it take the bait of belittlement which would have led to the renunciation of the glorious conquests of the present for the will-of-the-wisp of words cunningly pieced together. The meaning of the elections was plain. The people of France had judged.

And so also the Germans, but in how different a manner.

If they have as yet been unable to fathom the depth of their irredeemable downfall; if they have as yet been unable to discern the real meaning of the crowning act of the great tragedy, they still feel surging within them the deep sources of a life of work and of will. Their trouble is that they see the future only through the blood-red mists of a civilization grafted upon the survival of barbarism. If they can make themselves over, they will, little by little, attain the position to which they are justly entitled in the world. If they cannot, the victors, whether they realize it or not, must continue to mount close guard over lands whose borders have become as President Wilson said, "the frontiers of freedom."

The maintenance of these frontiers which was the constant aim of French effort at the Conference, is of no small moment. It took the convulsions of a Russia thrown far out of her orbit and threatening Warsaw to reveal to minds wilfully closed, the fundamental issues of the Polish question. Once more the historic bravery of Poland stood the test. It was none the less fortunate that the Red Army quickly reached the end of its supplies and found itself abandoned by the Allies when its own Government was unable to renew them.

How many European questions are pending, to say nothing of the others!

First the most urgent. If, in the matter of balance of power, some have not sinned by excess of foresight, is not that an added reason why public men should keep a watchful eye upon those sectors whence clouds may arise upon the horizon?

Watchfulness for a day is not what is wanted. Who can measure the convulsions which this war has caused, or predict a time limit for the evolution of ever changing world conditions? Consider for example the century-long efforts to build up this Europe of ours which has fallen in ruins.

But what avails it to discuss the most intricate problems, the solution of which, always more or less a matter of chance, may lead to cruel mistakes, if personal quarrels magnified by misunder-

## INTRODUCTION

standings are to decide questions whose dangers are light-heartedly to be left to a future pregnant with the unknowable.

What avails it, having multiplied the means of prevision, having conquered the right of self-government by skilfully devised political adjustments, to shut one's eyes to urgent developments through fear of momentary embarrassments. What avails it to seek (oh, how keenly) the honour of responsibilities, only to shed them at the first encounter whether from faint heart or unavowable parliamentary interest?

What avails it to be content with appearances, if we are to see in changes of system nothing more than the triumph of mere words?

What avails it to have set ourselves up in the places of the kings of old, if we are to deny our ideals by our acts?

These questions handed down from our fathers, we shall transmit to our sons who will not fail to pass them on to posterity for ends the tangled skein of which will not soon be unravelled.

And yet we must live and, if all things remain pending in this world where naught is completed except by continual evolution, the first requisite of life is to make sure in the present day of those things whose lawful development is to determine one by one the moments of destiny.

This is the pressing duty of our day. The Treaty signed is but a fluttering scrap of paper unless it is enforced. To achieve this we put everything in action. For what result? That is what it is time to know.

War can lead to the domination of arms, as peace can lead to the slackening of our will. Man being wont to oppose himself to man by combinations of strength, the natural temptation to encroach upon one's neighbor entails a righteous resistance where the forces of each are measured. The strongest in this world—by that I mean the best—will be the most vigilant, the best prepared to defend themselves against every evil enterprise, the readiest to aid their harassed neighbor who, in turn, will come to their aid.

With or without treaty that is our common law; and Boche treachery is but a renewed invitation to us to be on our guard. If there are sentinels who slumber or allow themselves to be taken unawares, the people who have all at stake must react in their own defense. When I ask that public opinion be awakened, it is because too often those who have wielded power have wielded it only to put public opinion to sleep. Would you behold public opinion at work and at the same time judge those who are at such pains to deter it? Remember the great tragedy of the Second Punic War.

## INTRODUCTION

When Varro bowed down by defeat at Cannæ found himself under the walls of Rome, he was met by the Senate and the people came to congratulate him on not having despaired of the Republic. In this hour of mortal anguish, everything was great in the city of defeat. Some met the extreme peril with dauntless courage, others imposing silence on legitimate anger, found in supreme responsibility a grand revolt and last great effort; salvation was the reward of a miracle, than which none finer has ever been seen.

Rome knew such greatness that the infinite abjection of its decadence has never been able to tarnish the memory thereof. Was ever a moment when this people, of which history is so replete, gave a more marvelous exhibition of moral splendour and of triumphant confidence in the strength of its will power?

It is at such junctures that hearts are made manifest. The weak and the strong are at one. Rome wills it. Not a murmur is heard. Of complaints, recriminations, evil insinuations, not a whisper. Not a tremour of weakness. Not even an idle word. The strong-souled and feeble-hearted alike are proof against the terrors of disaster.

The nation which by surfeit of weakness had brought this day to pass, is the same which in the midst of the catastrophe suddenly found itself again. All that they were and all that they had was given to the State. And Fabius, who had seen Varro preferred to him, who after having been accused of cowardice because he was unwilling to risk battles like that which so nearly wiped Rome off the face of the earth, Fabius marched in the parade which brought to the vanquished leader the homage of a sublime faith that Varro victorious would have awaited in vain. A great wave of super-human will-power has swept away all hesitations, all the errors, all the miseries and crimes which go to rot in the discard of history, leaving behind only the resistless forces of rebirth. The episode assumes such grandeur that the halo of Rome melts into the apotheosis of mankind. One is proud to be a man, if man no matter whence he come, or where he goes, can rise so high.

But I have strayed far from our critics and from the surly attitude which it has pleased some of them to adopt. Will it be urged that victory accounts for many shortcomings—tempts many to depart from “the street called straight” by the assurance it gives of the future—whereas the extremity of misfortune may give rise to the highest reactions? That is too easy a way out. Far greater than the duel between Carthage and Rome, portentous indeed though it was, is the drama of domination fought out between

## INTRODUCTION

modern Germany and the nations who were able to save the independence of the world. An old saying alleges that one is never so vanquished nor so victorious as one seems. If Rome took her revenge, Hannibal has often been charged with having lent her the support of his strategy.

Who indeed in the hour of victory can say what its scope will be? Who indeed when the sun set over Austerlitz could have foreseen its rise over Moscow and Waterloo? Victories in themselves are but the brutal crushing of one military force by another. The conquerors must show themselves capable of improving their victory. For that men and time are needed.

No one suggests that the discontented have not found weak spots in our victory. The underlying causes of all alliances conspire—no matter what one says or does—to rise to the light of day. Should this not have been guarded against, more especially as the Government was bound to secrecy? And as the peace of to-morrow could be based only on the confidence of the country in the means provided by the Government of victory, who could be so blind as to undermine it to the point of attempting to ruin in the minds of the victors the very means of regeneration, the “rigorous enforcement” of which is now being clamorously urged?

Finally were there not, as to-day, Germans, beaten but not crushed, ready by a rare blending of shameless trickery and pugnacity to aspire to hegemony? Could the belittlement of victory, could the heightening of the morale of defeat serve any useful purpose? Alas, the attempt has already borne fruit so abundant that I fear to make things worse by casting up the account. To-day, as yesterday, as to-morrow, no continuation of success can be expected save from the interior discipline of peoples worthy of conceiving and of realizing the new order of a just peace of labour.

Vanquished, our lot under Ludendorff would not have differed from that of Rome under Hannibal. Victorious, we have assumed our responsibility in the most noble effort to achieve a lasting peace by the sole forces of Right. To one and all such a state was well worth a general effort of self-restraint instead of the old rush to divide the spoils between those who had overcome the enemy.

The future will decide. The mastery rests with him who wills most strongly and most enduringly. Ambition is of worth but by its aim. The higher the aim, the nobler the character, the stronger the will must be. Neither nobility of aspiration nor strength of

## INTRODUCTION

courage can be lacking to France. Fixity of ideas, method and continuity of purpose have been the three things most lacking in our history. Can we not derive from the trials of these times the strength to enhance the glories of war—inadequate to nourish a nation—by a superior use of those attainments of peace which so often were the glory of our past?

To make sure of the future, we must forge it ourselves. Hammers and anvils are there. How about our brawn?

These ideals are all your own, my dear friend, and they radiate in your pages from the light of well-ordered facts. I thank you once again for having served them well.

Your good friend,

G. CLEMENCEAU.

TO M. ANDRÉ TARDIEU,  
PARIS



# CONTENTS

| CHAPTER   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I GERMAN AGGRESSION . . . . .                             | 1    |
| II THE WAR AND THE ARMISTICE . . . . .                    | 27   |
| III THE PEACE CONFERENCE . . . . .                        | 77   |
| IV THE DISARMAMENT OF GERMANY . . . . .                   | 125  |
| V THE LEFT BANK OF THE RHINE . . . . .                    | 145  |
| VI TREATIES OF GUARANTEE . . . . .                        | 202  |
| VII ALSACE AND LORRAINE . . . . .                         | 233  |
| VIII THE SARRE BASIN . . . . .                            | 250  |
| IX WHAT GERMANY MUST PAY . . . . .                        | 280  |
| X HOW THE ALLIES WILL BE PAID . . . . .                   | 320  |
| XI GERMAN UNITY . . . . .                                 | 353  |
| XII RECONSTRUCTION AND THE FUTURE OF FRANCE . . . . .     | 376  |
| XIII HOW THE PEACE IS BEING ENFORCED . . . . .            | 409  |
| XIV FRANCE; GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES . . . . . | 437  |