

THE MENACE OF
NATIONALISM
IN EDUCATION

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BY

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TO
MY MOTHER

FOREWORD

THIS book is the outcome of several months' travel and research in France, Germany and England. It is based principally on the study of textbooks in the collections of the Musée Pédagogique of Paris, the Deutsche Bücherei of Leipzig, and the London County Council.

I take this occasion to thank the officials of these institutions for the help they have given me in my work and for their uniform kindness and courtesy. I am also under obligations to many other persons in all three countries, for suggestions and information. I am especially grateful to Mr. E. J. Frazer Hearne, of Littlehampton, for generously going over the manuscript.

JONATHAN F. SCOTT.

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CHAPTER I

EDUCATION AND THE PROBLEM OF WORLD PEACE

It is one of the healthiest symptoms of the world's gradual recovery from war-madness that the search for some road leading to permanent peace is both insistent and persistent. Practically everybody wants world peace; people differ only as to the means by which it can best be attained. One man pins his faith to the League of Nations, another to the World Court, a third to the outlawry of war, a fourth to progressive disarmament, and a fifth to a pact among the Great Powers. In general, demand concentrates on the establishment of some form of international supervision or control; and much has already been done to turn theory into practice. Such progress stimulates hope.

If in all this there is good ground for hope, however, there is little for the short-sighted optimism that rests content with half measures. Even though all the nations of the world join the League, even though they agree with solemn oath to outlaw war, to submit all international disputes to adjudication, to take predetermined steps against the aggression of any

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oath-breaking country, they cannot guarantee perpetual peace. To ensure peace the nations have long made treaties with one another; and the pages of history are strewn with broken treaties. To ensure peace, to moderate barbarities in time of war, the nations slowly and painfully built up a great body of international law. But during four years of conflict, international law was honoured rather in the breach than in the observance. The establishment of machinery of international control, necessary though it be, leaves the problem of preventing war not half solved—not a quarter solved. It is but a good beginning.

The essential difficulty is that no machinery of international control can eradicate the psychological causes of war. And these are the most fundamental, their roots extending deep down into the subsoil of human nature. It is safe to say that the government of no great nation really desires to involve itself in war with any other great nation. Nor does the normal man in normal times desire conflict. But in time of intense national crisis the normal man becomes abnormal. Inhibitions relax their stern rule. The psychological causes of war come into play, and public opinion becomes angry, suspicious and pugnacious. And these causes operate the more dangerously in modern times because they have long been under the influence of one of the most powerful of psychological stimulants : mass education.

Of the psychological causes of war perhaps the most important is fear. Fear, ages old, ever present or hovering in the background of consciousness, is ever ready to see peril where there is none, to exaggerate it where it is slight. It is largely fear that leads a nation to maintain and train intensively a large army

or navy. It is precisely this large army or navy that excites the fears of other nations. It is largely fear that leads a victorious nation to demand territorial concessions from the defeated. And these territorial concessions in turn raise the fears of the defeated country, impelling it at the same time to antagonism and the desire for *revanche*, thus paving the way for a new war. It was largely fear of Germany that led to the formation of the Triple Entente. It was largely fear of the Triple Entente that led the States of the Triple Alliance to increase their war preparations. And it was from the mutual fears and suspicions of the two groups that the Great War finally came. Each group believed the other the aggressor. "Every war appears to the people who conduct it as defensive, precisely because every war is to some extent based upon fear."¹

If shrinking fear leads to war, so also do some of the more aggressive qualities of mankind, such as pugnacity and love of power. Plain, primitive pugnacity, ordinarily dormant, rises rapidly to the forefront of consciousness in time of crisis. It seems to be curiously strong in the old and the elderly, with whom it is none the less vehement for being vicarious. Love of power works hand in hand with fear to promote war; for what one man wants for security, another desires for the sake of power. Partridge holds this love of power to be the most fundamental of all war's causes,² though others would place fear first. Closely associated with love of power is pride, stupidly involving the individual or the group in difficulties, stupidly blocking extrication for fear of loss of what is mis-called "honour." It is this pride which stiffens the backs of diplomats and statesmen when they ought

¹ Partridge, *Psychology of Nations*, p. 73.

² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

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to compromise, and turns an "incident" into a disaster.

Finally, there is the so-called "herd instinct." "Thanks to his herd instinct," says MacCurdy, "which makes man accept the opinions of those immediately around him—herd, or 'mob' suggestion—only that seems to be right which is done by his group, and an abnormal suspicion of the acts of other groups develops. Thus a state of antagonism develops which is much augmented by the aggressive tendency latent in human nature. The antagonism is cumulative, so that sooner or later a state of extreme tension is reached. At this point, when action of some sort seems imperative, the primitive unconscious instincts of man assert themselves (as they constantly tend to do), and the herd, finding in this a ready weapon, relaxes the ban, making of blood lust a virtue."¹

In what is called the civilized world, the "herd" to-day is the nation. And the nation is afflicted with what Clutton-Brock has called "pooled self-esteem": "a kind of national egotism, having all the symptoms and absurdities and dangers of personal egotism, or self-esteem."² Each nation indulges in extravaganzas of self-praise. Each tends to assert loudly its superiority to the rest. Each is conscious of its own rectitude as a nation, but fears the evil intentions and diabolical cunning of some other or others. Frenchmen are sure they will never do anything to disturb the peace of the world, but fear the renewal of German aggression. "We are a peaceable people," say the French. "All we ask is to be let alone." Germans are confident of their own good faith, but equally confident that Frenchmen are plotting the destruction

¹ *Psychology of War*, pp. 51-2

² "Pooled Self-Esteem," *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1921.

of Germany. "We are a peaceable people," say the Germans. "All we ask is to be let alone." Americans are alarmed at the "Japanese peril," Japanese at the American; and out of such fears and suspicions may come an otherwise avoidable war of the Pacific.

"What is the attitude of any nation towards war in time of peace? War, of course, is damnable, all readily agree. But this is war as an abstraction. What do the citizens of any given country think of their own wars? All are excusable, some justifiable, some glorious." ¹ Professor C. R. Fish, placing scholarly impartiality above narrow nationalism, has said, "Neither the war of 1812 nor the Spanish war was necessary. Those responsible for both justified themselves by referring to causes which had long been in existence." ² But the gorge of the "hundred per cent. American" rises at such a statement. He prefers to believe that the United States has never been at all to blame in its wars. What is more, he is honest in his belief. The scientific historian may know better; but your simon-pure "patriot" pays no more attention to historical scholarship than a Fundamentalist does to the higher criticism.

It is easy to see the absurdity of this intense nationalism in the people of other countries, but very difficult in the case of our own. But how can there be enduring peace while the nations are at once so pugnacious and so full of fear, so proud of themselves, so intolerant of others, so suspicious of one another, so blind to their own faults and weaknesses? What is to prevent the new international machinery, slowly developing in the new spirit of hope, from breaking down in time of crisis, as have treaties and international law in the

¹ MacCurdy, *Psychology of War* p 30

² *American Diplomacy*, p 408

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past? Not until there is a more enlightened public opinion among the nations of the world, not until there is a wider and truer acceptance of the international ideal, not until there develops a spirit of national self-examination and self-criticism, can a solid foundation be laid for enduring peace.

Now, as has already been indicated, there is one great force militating against that enlightened public opinion which constitutes the most effective guarantee of peace. That force is education. While statesmen and jurists at Geneva are exercising the highest intelligence and the most careful diplomacy in smoothing the path to a new world order, writers of textbooks and teachers of reading, history, geography and civics are training the world's children to nationalistic narrowness, to nationalistic prejudices. To their own country, teachers and texts give disproportionate attention, magnifying its achievements and those of its leaders, past and present, keeping silent in regard to its faults or "rationalizing" these into virtues. Other countries they tend to neglect, disparage or criticize severely. To the international idea some lip service is paid; but there is little real enthusiasm for it where it appears to conflict with some cherished national prejudice. Thus, what should be a training for world culture and an international point of view becomes education in compartments. And the prejudices thus inculcated in the impressionable years of childhood, remain throughout life, and form the basis of that miscalled patriotism to which an opportunist and chauvinistic press so easily appeals, and which in time of crisis it stirs to arms.

For the most part, of course, teachers and writers of textbooks are unconscious that they distort the truth. Patriotism they conceive as one of the highest virtues.