

It Is the Day of Judgment for Monarchies, The Day of Testing for Democracies

An aged ruler, seeing death approach, feared that his passing might be followed by the division of his empire. Within its borders were conflicting racial elements, bound together only by the despotic sway of the throne. On its flank was a brave little country that represented the national ambitions of many who yielded sullen submission to the old man's scepter.

A madman slew a princeling. The fear-smitten Emperor saw, or thought he saw, behind the wanton blow a deliberate plot against his dynasty. He was human; bitterness filled his soul; passion inflamed his mind; ambitious statesmen fanned the fires of hate.

Around him lay Europe, a vast magazine of explosives, awaiting only the spark to release its disrupting and destructive forces. Yet, with his hand trembling from the palsy of age, he flung the lighted torch into its midst.

Today the boom of the cannon, the rattle of rifles and the scream of the shell that carries death on its jagged wings, tell the story of the old man's deed. A little crimson stream begins to run that will broaden into a river, dyeing the soil of every old world country.

Two other rulers, each fearing for the stability of his throne or the integrity of his dominions, have joined issue, and are dragging into the chaos of strife Europe's one great republic, who, desiring peace, and having in herself no occasion for quarrel, finds war forced upon her by an invading army.

And England, where democracy has made of monarchy in most things but a symbol, calmest of all great powers, striving to the last to avert the threatened cataclysm, arms to defend herself and her allies.

Into the whirlpool of war will be drawn little states to whom peace is the only good, but whose defenseless territories lie in the pathway of the great armies. Swarming to the feast of carnage will come the hot-blooded men of the southern mountain kingdoms, to whose fierce courage fighting is like wine.

Thus three men—Emperor, Czar and Kaiser—have kindled a fire under the fabric of civilization that in a few weeks may consume what a century cannot restore.

Thus three men—wearing crowns by accident of birth—have sent millions of their fellows to face what, for all they know, may prove to be the most stupendous horror of the ages.

And those who march today, and who tomorrow will pay in the coin of blood for the upkeep of dynasties, had no voice in the issue. The die was cast by the jeweled hands of rulers that called the bare and knotted hands of toil to lay down tools of peaceful craft and take up guns against their brothers.

It is significant that underlying all the cheering of the thoughtless mob, drunk with the wine of a loyalty soon to be obsolete, there has been heard the deeper mutterings of popular protest.

In Russia alone of the nations of Europe has there been evidence of genuine and widespread eagerness for war. Russia is still barbaric. The leaven of democracy has made small headway among the masses of her people. Those who would distribute it are sought out, seized and sent to Siberia.

But Italy, afraid of her working class, declared herself neutral. In Germany thousands of men and women paraded the streets of the capital and shouted, "Down with war!"

In France the workers raised a like cry, and the "Internationale," the song of labor's world-wide brotherhood, has been heard more often in the streets of Paris than the "Marsellaise."

In England Lloyd-George, the mouthpiece of democracy, is said to have split the cabinet by his opposition to war. Keir Hardie, who came from the ranks of the toilers, appeals to labor to make war impossible. The miners of Wales refuse to forego a holiday at the request of the British admiralty, and urge the calling of a convention of the miners of all nations to force upon the governments of Europe their views condemnatory of war.

It is probably too late now for any of these plans or protests to be effective. But their appearance so generally is full of meaning. And full of meaning, too, is the fact that as you read of them they stir your sympathy. You feel these king-ridden multitudes, driven to the slaughter of their fellows and to face their own doom, would be justified in almost any course that freed them from bondage so bitter. For the vision of peace and the dream of brotherhood has gripped the imagination of the world, and where yesterday we would have applauded the patriotism and courage of warring nations, today we stand aghast as our nobler dream is dissipated by the angry breath of three mad monarchs.

When the struggle is ended, when five great powers, weary and wounded, withdraw their armies and count the cost, monarchy in Europe will face its day of judgment. Then those who have fought at the bidding of kings and emperors will demand a reckoning. It is inconceivable that the masses of Europe will permit again the possibility of such betrayal as they are now suffering.

Happy is our own country. Among civilized nations she alone at this hour is unshaken by the alarms of war. Even little Japan, remote from the

immediate scene of conflict, feels called upon to mobilize her fleet. Our Canadian neighbors offer 50,000 men to their mother land. Australia, New Zealand and South Africa join them in readiness to defend the empire.

Here, in the United States, is serenity amid the tumult of the world. But it is no time for self-righteousness or complacent pride. Yesterday a Chicago preacher took for his theme, "Americans Are the Only Christians." Out on such pious arrogance! Let us humbly accept the responsibility that comes to us in this crisis of the human race, the responsibility of proving that a self-controlled democracy may possess a strength, a breadth of vision and a spirit of magnanimity impossible of realization where men are thralls to the king idea and slaves of dynastic militarism.

We are distressed by the smug satisfaction with which some predict that this nation will prosper through Europe's tribulation. Yesterday we heard a man say, "I had been hoping there would be war so I might pick up some securities at bargain counter prices, and now they have closed the stock exchanges and there is no trading."

That shocks you, as it shocked us; but it is the same spirit that gloats over the prospects of national advantage out of cosmic misfortune.

Whatever measure of benefit comes to us, let it be accepted in the spirit of stewardship rather than in boastful self-congratulation. It may be ours to minister to a stricken continent, abased, impoverished, starving. Never has history offered such an opportunity to a great nation. Shall we not prepare to meet it greatly?

But, though good may come to us, we cannot hope to miss our share of the burden. Even those who take no part in the struggle will have to pay part of the cost, for so the world is made today. We have been linked too closely in the bonds of industry and commerce not to suffer in common with others, although the wound fall directly on them and not on us.

When the war cloud first shadowed the old world sky, wheat, the staple of human existence, soared in the pit. Men bought eagerly to sell again at Europe's famine prices. Then suddenly they awoke to the fact that transportation might be impossible. Lloyd's refused insurance. Ocean-going hulls in which to carry the cargoes that meant fortunes to their owners were unavailable.

Then the cry went up, "Oh, that we had a merchant marine!" But, suppose we had, foodstuffs that may serve for the consumption of a belligerent nation's army or naval forces are contraband of war, and could be shipped to any of the fighting countries of Europe only in violation of American neutrality and at the risk of capture. Had we a merchant marine today our navy would have to accompany it, and in brief time the United States would be swept into the maelstrom of conflict.

So wheat is dropping again, and it is well, if it does not drop too far. We have our own people to feed, and why should they be forced to pay a possible famine price in order that speculators may be enriched?

Nor is it clear how we shall profit greatly through any other channel because of Europe's trouble. Even if the war be brief the destruction of wealth will reach unimaginable billions of dollars. The old world will be in need, but impoverished. It will knock at the door of America as a beggar, rather than a customer. It will appeal to our pity, rather than as an opportunity for exploitation. If it can find the means, or obtain the credit, to purchase what we produce its wants will be so great that the cost of living at home will rise under the extraordinary demand.

It is impossible for us to escape some share of the burden that three stubborn monarchs are heaping up for the world.

On the other hand, there are these things to be considered: The trade of South America and the Orient will come to us. The Panama Canal is ready as this hour of opportunity strikes. We must improve it by diligent and foresighted effort. We owe it to the rest of the world to do so, for civilization will need a strong arm upon which to lean.

And it is this that should be the sobering thought for America now—not her opportunity to gain at the expense of others, but her responsibility for mankind when the irresponsible frenzy of war has seized upon all other great governments.

It is this thought that should occupy the minds of our statesmen as they confer, and of our great financiers as they plan to preserve the nation's economic structure from possible shock.

In the blood of Europe the destiny of America is being written. When the last battleship has been sunk, when the last engagement has been lost and won, and the shattered remnants of armies return to the weeping women in a thousand towns and villages; when rulers and statesmen and diplomats take breath again to contemplate the ruin wrought by their folly, it seems inevitable that towering over all should be the sturdy, unshaken figure of America, in politics, in industry, in finance the master of the world.

If the God who holds the nations like the dust of the balance in His hands be leading us to this high destiny, let us approach it humbly; and may He grant that in the day of our power we shall be wise and gentle in its exercise.—Chicago Evening Post.