

What is Coming?

By

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CONTENTS

1. FORECASTING THE FUTURE
2. THE END OF THE WAR
3. NATIONS IN LIQUIDATION
4. BRAINTREE, BOCKING, AND THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD
5. How FAR WILL EUROPE GO TOWARD SOCIALISM?
6. LAWYER AND PRESS
7. THE NEW EDUCATION
8. WHAT THE WAR IS DOING FOR WOMEN
9. THE NEW MAP OF EUROPE
10. THE UNITED STATES, FRANCE, BRITAIN, AND RUSSIA
11. THE "WHITE MAN'S BURTHEN"
12. THE OUTLOOK FOR THE GERMANS

I. FORECASTING THE FUTURE

Prophecy may vary between being an intellectual amusement and a serious occupation; serious not only in its intentions, but in its consequences. For it is the lot of prophets who frighten or disappoint to be stoned. But for some of us moderns, who have been touched with the spirit of science, prophesying is almost a habit of mind.

Science is very largely analysis aimed at forecasting. The test of any scientific law is our verification of its anticipations. The scientific training develops the idea that whatever is going to happen is really here now--if only one could see it. And when one is taken by surprise the tendency is not to say with the untrained man, "Now, who'd ha' thought it?" but "Now, what was it we overlooked?"

Everything that has ever existed or that will ever exist is here--for anyone who has eyes to see. But some of it demands eyes of superhuman penetration. Some of it is patent; we are almost as certain of next Christmas and the tides of the year 1960 and the death before 3000 A.D. of everybody now alive as if these things had already happened. Below that level of certainty, but still at a very high level of certainty, there are such things as that men will probably be making aeroplanes of an improved pattern in 1950, or that there will be a through railway connection between Constantinople and Bombay and between Baku and Bombay in the next half-century. From such grades of certainty as this, one may

come down the scale until the most obscure mystery of all is reached: the mystery of the individual. Will England presently produce a military genius? or what will Mr. Belloc say the day after to-morrow? The most accessible field for the prophet is the heavens; the least is the secret of the jumping cat within the human skull. How will so-and-so behave, and how will the nation take it? For such questions as that we need the subtlest guesses of all.

Yet, even to such questions as these the sharp, observant man may risk an answer with something rather better than an even chance of being right.

The present writer is a prophet by use and wont. He is more interested in to-morrow than he is in to-day, and the past is just material for future guessing. "Think of the men who have walked here!" said a tourist in the Roman Coliseum. It was a Futurist mind that answered: "Think of the men who will." It is surely as interesting that presently some founder of the World Republic, some obstinate opponent of militarism or legalism, or the man who will first release atomic energy for human use, will walk along the Via Sacra as that Cicero or Giordano Bruno or Shelley have walked there in the past. To the prophetic mind all history is and will continue to be a prelude. The prophetic type will steadfastly refuse to see the world as a museum; it will insist that here is a stage set for a drama that perpetually begins.

Now this forecasting disposition has led the writer not only to publish

a book of deliberate prophesying, called "Anticipations," but almost without premeditation to scatter a number of more or less obvious prophecies through his other books. From first to last he has been writing for twenty years, so that it is possible to check a certain proportion of these anticipations by the things that have happened, Some of these shots have hit remarkably close to the bull's-eye of reality; there are a number of inners and outers, and some clean misses. Much that he wrote about in anticipation is now established commonplace. In 1894 there were still plenty of sceptics of the possibility either of automobiles or aeroplanes; it was not until 1898 that Mr. S.P. Langley (of the Smithsonian Institute) could send the writer a photograph of a heavier-than-air flying machine actually in the air. There were articles in the monthly magazines of those days proving that flying was impossible.

One of the writer's luckiest shots was a description (in "Anticipations" in 1900) of trench warfare, and of a deadlock almost exactly upon the lines of the situation after the battle of the Marne. And he was fortunate (in the same work) in his estimate of the limitations of submarines. He anticipated Sir Percy Scott by a year in his doubts of the decisive value of great battleships (see "An Englishman Looks at the World"); and he was sound in denying the decadence of France; in doubting (before the Russo-Japanese struggle) the greatness of the power of Russia, which was still in those days a British bogey; in making Belgium the battle-ground in a coming struggle between the mid-European Powers and the rest of Europe; and (he believes) in foretelling a

renascent Poland. Long before Europe was familiar with the engaging personality of the German Crown Prince, he represented great airships sailing over England (which country had been too unenterprising to make any) under the command of a singularly anticipatory Prince Karl, and in "The World Set Free" the last disturber of the peace is a certain "Balkan Fox."

In saying, however, here and there that "before such a year so-and-so will happen," or that "so-and-so will not occur for the next twenty years," he was generally pretty widely wrong; most of his time estimates are too short; he foretold, for example, a special motor track apart from the high road between London and Brighton before 1910, which is still a dream, but he doubted if effective military aviation or aerial fighting would be possible before 1950, which is a miss on the other side. He will draw a modest veil over certain still wider misses that the idle may find for themselves in his books; he prefers to count the hits and leave the reckoning of the misses to those who will find a pleasure in it.

Of course, these prophecies of the writer's were made upon a basis of very generalised knowledge. What can be done by a really sustained research into a particular question--especially if it is a question essentially mechanical--is shown by the work of a Frenchman all too neglected by the trumpet of fame--Clement Ader. M. Ader was probably the first man to get a mechanism up into the air for something more than a leap. His Eole, as General Mensier testifies, prolonged a jump as far

as fifty metres as early as 1890. In 1897 his Avion fairly flew. (This is a year ahead of the date of my earliest photograph of S.P. Langley's aeropile in mid-air.) This, however, is beside our present mark. The fact of interest here is that in 1908, when flying was still almost incredible, M. Ader published his "Aviation Militaire." Well, that was eight years ago, and men have been fighting in the air now for a year, and there is still nothing being done that M. Ader did not see, and which we, if we had had the wisdom to attend to him, might not have been prepared for. There is much that he foretells which is still awaiting its inevitable fulfilment. So clearly can men of adequate knowledge and sound reasoning power see into the years ahead in all such matters of material development.

But it is not with the development of mechanical inventions that the writer now proposes to treat. In this book he intends to hazard certain forecasts about the trend of events in the next decade or so. Mechanical novelties will probably play a very small part in that coming history. This world-wide war means a general arrest of invention and enterprise, except in the direction of the war business. Ability is concentrated upon that; the types of ability that are not applicable to warfare are neglected; there is a vast destruction of capital and a waste of the savings that are needed to finance new experiments. Moreover, we are killing off many of our brightest young men.

It is fairly safe to assume that there will be very little new furniture on the stage of the world for some considerable time; that if there is

much difference in the roads and railways and shipping it will be for the worse; that architecture, domestic equipment, and so on, will be fortunate if in 1924 they stand where they did in the spring of 1914. In the trenches of France and Flanders, and on the battlefields of Russia, the Germans have been spending and making the world spend the comfort, the luxury and the progress of the next quarter-century. There is no accounting for tastes. But the result is that, while it was possible for the writer in 1900 to write "Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical Progress upon Human Life and Thought," in 1916 his anticipations must belong to quite another system of consequences.

The broad material facts before us are plain enough. It is the mental facts that have to be unravelled. It isn't now a question of "What thing--what faculty--what added power will come to hand, and how will it affect our ways of living?" It is a question of "How are people going to take these obvious things--waste of the world's resources, arrest of material progress, the killing of a large moiety of the males in nearly every European country, and universal loss and unhappiness?" We are going to deal with realities here, at once more intimate and less accessible than the effects of mechanism.

As a preliminary reconnaissance, as it were, over the region of problems we have to attack, let us consider the difficulties of a single question, which is also a vital and central question in this forecast.

We shall not attempt a full answer here, because too many of the factors must remain unexamined; later, perhaps, we may be in a better position

to do so. This question is the probability of the establishment of a long world peace.

At the outset of the war there was a very widely felt hope among the intellectuals of the world that this war might clear up most of the outstanding international problems, and prove the last war. The writer, looking across the gulf of experience that separates us from 1914, recalls two pamphlets whose very titles are eloquent of this feeling--"The War that will End War," and "The Peace of the World." Was the hope expressed in those phrases a dream? Is it already proven a dream? Or can we read between the lines of the war news, diplomatic disputations, threats and accusations, political wranglings and stories of hardship and cruelty that now fill our papers, anything that still justifies a hope that these bitter years of world sorrow are the darkness before the dawn of a better day for mankind? Let us handle this problem for a preliminary examination.

What is really being examined here is the power of human reason to prevail over passion--and certain other restraining and qualifying forces. There can be little doubt that, if one could canvass all mankind and ask them whether they would rather have no war any more, the overwhelming mass of them would elect for universal peace. If it were war of the modern mechanical type that was in question, with air raids, high explosives, poison gas and submarines, there could be no doubt at all about the response. "Give peace in our time, O Lord," is more than ever the common prayer of Christendom, and the very war makers claim to

be peace makers; the German Emperor has never faltered in his assertion that he encouraged Austria to send an impossible ultimatum to Serbia, and invaded Belgium because Germany was being attacked. The Krupp-Kaiser Empire, he assures us, is no eagle, but a double-headed lamb, resisting the shearers and butchers. The apologists for war are in a hopeless minority; a certain number of German Prussians who think war good for the soul, and the dear ladies of the London Morning Post who think war so good for the manners of the working classes, are rare, discordant voices in the general chorus against war. If a mere unsupported and uncoordinated will for peace could realise itself, there would be peace, and an enduring peace, to-morrow. But, as a matter of fact, there is no peace coming to-morrow, and no clear prospect yet of an enduring universal peace at the end of this war.

Now what are the obstructions, and what are the antagonisms to the exploitation of this world-wide disgust with war and the world-wide desire for peace, so as to establish a world peace?

Let us take them in order, and it will speedily become apparent that we are dealing here with a subtle quantitative problem in psychology, a constant weighing of whether this force or that force is the stronger. We are dealing with influences so subtle that the accidents of some striking dramatic occurrence, for example, may turn them this way or that. We are dealing with the human will--and thereby comes a snare for the feet of the would-be impartial prophet. To foretell the future is to modify the future. It is hard for any prophet not to break into

exhortation after the fashion of the prophets of Israel.

The first difficulty in the way of establishing a world peace is that it is nobody's business in particular. Nearly all of us want a world peace--in an amateurish sort of way. But there is no specific person or persons to whom one can look for the initiatives. The world is a supersaturated solution of the will-for-peace, and there is nothing for it to crystallise upon. There is no one in all the world who is responsible for the understanding and overcoming of the difficulties involved. There are many more people, and there is much more intelligence concentrated upon the manufacture of cigarettes or hairpins than upon the establishment of a permanent world peace. There are a few special secretaries employed by philanthropic Americans, and that is about all. There has been no provision made even for the emoluments of these gentlemen when universal peace is attained; presumably they would lose their jobs.

Nearly everybody wants peace; nearly everybody would be glad to wave a white flag with a dove on it now--provided no unfair use was made of such a demonstration by the enemy--but there is practically nobody thinking out the arrangements needed, and nobody making nearly as much propaganda for the instruction of the world in the things needful as is made in selling any popular make of automobile. We have all our particular businesses to attend to. And things are not got by just wanting them; things are got by getting them, and rejecting whatever precludes our getting them.

That is the first great difficulty: the formal Peace Movement is quite amateurish.

It is so amateurish that the bulk of people do not even realise the very first implication of the peace of the world. It has not succeeded in bringing this home to them.

If there is to be a permanent peace of the world, it is clear that there must be some permanent means of settling disputes between Powers and nations that would otherwise be at war. That means that there must be some head power, some point of reference, a supreme court of some kind, a universally recognised executive over and above the separate Governments of the world that exist to-day. That does not mean that those Governments have to disappear, that "nationality" has to be given up, or anything so drastic as that. But it does mean that all those Governments have to surrender almost as much of their sovereignty as the constituent sovereign States which make up the United States of America have surrendered to the Federal Government; if their unification is to be anything more than a formality, they will have to delegate a control of their inter-State relations to an extent for which few minds are prepared at present.

It is really quite idle to dream of a warless world in which States are still absolutely free to annoy one another with tariffs, with the blocking and squeezing of trade routes, with the ill-treatment of

immigrants and travelling strangers, and between which there is no means of settling boundary disputes. Moreover, as between the united States of the world and the United States of America there is this further complication of the world position: that almost all the great States of Europe are in possession, firstly, of highly developed territories of alien language and race, such as Egypt; and, secondly, of barbaric and less-developed territories, such as Nigeria or Madagascar. There will be nothing stable about a world settlement that does not destroy in these "possessions" the national preference of the countries that own them and that does not prepare for the immediate or eventual accession of these subject peoples to State rank. Most certainly, however, thousands of intelligent people in those great European countries who believe themselves ardent for a world peace will be staggered at any proposal to place any part of "our Empire" under a world administration on the footing of a United States territory. Until they cease to be staggered by anything of the sort, their aspirations for a permanent peace will remain disconnected from the main current of their lives. And that current will flow, sluggishly or rapidly, towards war. For essentially these "possessions" are like tariffs, like the strategic occupation of neutral countries or secret treaties; they are forms of the conflict between nations to oust and prevail over other nations.

Going on with such things and yet deprecating war is really not an attempt to abolish conflict; it is an attempt to retain conflict and limit its intensity; it is like trying to play hockey on the understanding that the ball shall never travel faster than eight miles

an hour.

Now it not only stands in our way to a permanent peace of the world that the great mass of men are not prepared for even the most obvious implications of such an idea, but there is also a second invincible difficulty--that there is nowhere in the world anybody, any type of men, any organisation, any idea, any nucleus or germ, that could possibly develop into the necessary over-Government. We are asking for something out of the air, out of nothingness, that will necessarily array against itself the resistance of all those who are in control, or interested in the control, of the affairs of sovereign States of the world as they are at present; the resistance of a gigantic network of Government organisations, interests, privileges, assumptions.

Against this a headless, vague aspiration, however universal, is likely to prove quite ineffective. Of course, it is possible to suggest that the Hague Tribunal is conceivably the germ of such an overriding direction and supreme court as the peace of the world demands, but in reality the Hague Tribunal is a mere legal automatic machine. It does nothing unless you set it in motion. It has no initiative. It does not even protest against the most obvious outrages upon that phantom of a world-conscience--international law.

Pacificists in their search for some definite starting-point, about which the immense predisposition for peace may crystallise, have suggested the Pope and various religious organisations as a possible

basis for the organisation of peace. But there would be no appeal from such a beginning to the non-Christian majority of mankind, and the suggestion in itself indicates a profound ignorance of the nature of the Christian churches. With the exception of the Quakers and a few Russian sects, no Christian sect or church has ever repudiated war; most have gone out of the way to sanction it and bless it.

It is altogether too rashly assumed by people whose sentimentality outruns their knowledge that Christianity is essentially an attempt to carry out the personal teachings of Christ. It is nothing of the sort, and no church authority will support that idea. Christianity--more particularly after the ascendancy of the Trinitarian doctrine was established--was and is a theological religion; it is the religion that triumphed over Arianism, Manichseism, Gnosticism, and the like; it is based not on Christ, but on its creeds. Christ, indeed, is not even its symbol; on the contrary, the chosen symbol of Christianity is the cross to which Christ was nailed and on which He died. It was very largely a religion of the legions. It was the warrior Theodosius who, more than any single other man, imposed it upon Europe.

There is no reason, therefore, either in precedent or profession, for expecting any plain lead from the churches in this tremendous task of organising and making effective the widespread desire of the world for peace. And even were this the case, it is doubtful if we should find in the divines and dignitaries of the Vatican, of the Russian and British official churches, or of any other of the multitudinous Christian sects,

the power and energy, the knowledge and ability, or even the goodwill needed to negotiate so vast a thing as the creation of a world authority.

One other possible starting-point has been suggested. It is no great feat for a naive imagination to suppose the President of the Swiss Confederation or the President of the United States--for each of these two systems is an exemplary and encouraging instance of the possibility of the pacific synthesis of independent States--taking a propagandist course and proposing extensions of their own systems to the suffering belligerents.

But nothing of the sort occurs. And when you come to look into the circumstances of these two Presidents you will discover that neither of them is any more free than anybody else to embark upon the task of creating a State-overriding, war-preventing organisation of the world. He has been created by a system, and he is bound to a system; his concern is with the interests of the people of Switzerland or of the United States of America. President Wilson, for example, is quite sufficiently occupied by the affairs of the White House, by the clash of political parties, by interferences with American overseas trade and the security of American citizens. He has no more time to give to projects for the fundamental reconstruction of international relationships than has any recruit drilling in England, or any captain on an ocean liner, or any engineer in charge of a going engine.

We are all, indeed, busy with the things that come to hand every day. We are all anxious for a permanent world peace, but we are all up to the neck in things that leave us no time to attend to this world peace that nearly every sane man desires.

Meanwhile, a small minority of people who trade upon contention--militarists, ambitious kings and statesmen, war contractors, loan mongers, sensational journalists--follow up their interests and start and sustain war.

There lies the paradoxical reality of this question. Our first inquiry lands us into the elucidation of this deadlock. Nearly everybody desires a world peace, and yet there is not apparent anywhere any man free and able and willing to establish it, while, on the other hand, there are a considerable number of men in positions of especial influence and power who will certainly resist the arrangements that are essential to its establishment.

But does this exhaust the question, and must we conclude that mankind is doomed to a perpetual, futile struggling of States and nations and peoples--breaking ever and again into war? The answer to that would probably, be "Yes" if it were not for the progress of war. War is continually becoming more scientific, more destructive, more coldly logical, more intolerant of non-combatants, and more exhausting of any kind of property. There is every reason to believe that it will continue to intensify these characteristics. By doing so it may presently bring

about a state of affairs that will supply just the lacking elements that are needed for the development of a world peace.

I would venture to suggest that the present war is doing so now: that it is producing changes in men's minds that may presently give us both the needed energy and the needed organisation from which a world direction may develop.

The first, most distinctive thing about this conflict is the exceptionally searching way in which it attacks human happiness. No war has ever destroyed happiness so widely. It has not only killed and wounded an unprecedented proportion of the male population of all the combatant nations, but it has also destroyed wealth beyond precedent. It has also destroyed freedom--of movement, of speech, of economic enterprise. Hardly anyone alive has escaped the worry of it and the threat of it. It has left scarcely a life untouched, and made scarcely a life happier. There is a limit to the principle that "everybody's business is nobody's business." The establishment of a world State, which was interesting only to a few cranks and visionaries before the war, is now the lively interest of a very great number of people. They inquire about it; they have become accessible to ideas about it.

Peace organisation seems, indeed, to be following the lines of public sanitation. Everybody in England, for example, was bored by the discussion of sanitation--until the great cholera epidemic. Everybody thought public health a very desirable thing, but nobody thought it

intensely and overridingly desirable. Then the interest in sanitation grew lively, and people exerted themselves to create responsible organisations. Crimes of violence, again, were neglected in the great cities of Europe until the danger grew to dimensions that evolved the police. There come occasions when the normal concentration of an individual upon his own immediate concerns becomes impossible; as, for instance, when a man who is stocktaking in his business premises discovers that the house next door is on fire. A great many people who have never troubled their heads about anything but their own purely personal and selfish interests are now realising that quite a multitude of houses about them are ablaze, and that the fire is spreading.

That is one change the war will bring about that will make for world peace: a quickened general interest in its possibility. Another is the certainty that the war will increase the number of devoted and fanatic characters available for disinterested effort. Whatever other outcome this war may have, it means that there lies ahead a period of extreme economic and political dislocation. The credit system has been strained, and will be strained, and will need unprecedented readjustments. In the past such phases of uncertainty, sudden impoverishment and disorder as certainly lie ahead of us, have meant for a considerable number of minds a release--or, if you prefer it, a flight--from the habitual and selfish. Types of intense religiosity, of devotion and of endeavour are let loose, and there will be much more likelihood that we may presently find, what it is impossible to find now, a number of devoted men and women ready to give their whole lives, with a quasi-religious

enthusiasm, to this great task of peace establishment, finding in such impersonal work a refuge from the disappointments, limitations, losses and sorrows of their personal life--a refuge we need but little in more settled and more prosperous periods. They will be but the outstanding individuals in a very universal quickening. And simultaneously with this quickening of the general imagination by experience there are certain other developments in progress that point very clearly to a change under the pressure of this war of just those institutions of nationality, kingship, diplomacy and inter-State competition that have hitherto stood most effectually in the way of a world pacification. The considerations that seem to point to this third change are very convincing, to my mind.

The real operating cause that is, I believe, going to break down the deadlock that has hitherto made a supreme court and a federal government for the world at large a dream, lies in just that possibility of an "inconclusive peace" which so many people seem to dread. Germany, I believe, is going to be beaten, but not completely crushed, by this war; she is going to be left militarist and united with Austria and Hungary, and unchanged in her essential nature; and out of that state of affairs comes, I believe, the hope for an ultimate confederation of the nations of the earth.

Because, in the face of a league of the Central European Powers attempting recuperation, cherishing revenge, dreaming of a renewal of the struggle, it becomes impossible for the British, the French, the Belgians, Russians, Italians or Japanese to think any longer of settling

their differences by war among themselves. To do so will mean the creation of opportunity for the complete reinstatement of German militarism. It will open the door for a conclusive German hegemony. Now, however clumsy and confused the diplomacy of these present Allies may be (challenged constantly, as it is, by democracy and hampered by a free, venal and irresponsible Press in at least three of their countries), the necessity they will be under will be so urgent and so evident, that it is impossible to imagine that they will not set up some permanent organ for the direction and co-ordination of their joint international relationships. It may be a queerly constituted body at first; it may be of a merely diplomatic pretension; it may be called a Congress, or any old name of that sort, but essentially its business will be to conduct a joint fiscal, military and naval policy, to keep the peace in the Balkans and Asia, to establish a relationship with China, and organise joint and several arbitration arrangements with America. And it must develop something more sure and swift than our present diplomacy. One of its chief concerns will be the right of way through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and the watching of the forces that stir up conflict in the Balkans and the Levant. It must have unity enough for that; it must be much more than a mere leisurely, unauthoritative conference of representatives.

For precisely similar reasons it seems to me incredible that the two great Central European Powers should ever fall into sustained conflict again with one another. They, too, will be forced to create some overriding body to prevent so suicidal a possibility. America too, it

may be, will develop some Pan-American equivalent. Probably the hundred millions of Latin America may achieve a method of unity, and then deal on equal terms with the present United States. The thing has been ably advocated already in South America. Whatever appearances of separate sovereignties are kept up after the war, the practical outcome of the struggle is quite likely to be this: that there will be only three great World Powers left--the anti-German allies, the allied Central Europeans, the Pan-Americans. And it is to be noted that, whatever the constituents of these three Powers may be, none of them is likely to be a monarchy. They may include monarchies, as England includes dukedoms. But they will be overriding alliances, not overriding rulers. I leave it to the mathematician to work out exactly how much the chances of conflict are diminished when there are practically only three Powers in the world instead of some scores. And these new Powers will be in certain respects unlike any existing European "States." None of the three Powers will be small or homogeneous enough to serve dynastic ambitions, embody a national or racial Kultur, or fall into the grip of any group of financial enterprises. They will be more comprehensive, less romantic, and more businesslike altogether. They will be, to use a phrase suggested a year or so ago, Great States.... And the war threat between the three will be so plain and definite, the issues will be so lifted out of the spheres of merely personal ambition and national feeling, that I do not see why the negotiating means, the standing conference of the three, should not ultimately become the needed nucleus of the World State for which at present we search the world in vain.

There are more ways than one to the World State, and this second possibility of a post-war conference and a conference of the Allies, growing almost unawares into a pacific organisation of the world, since it goes on directly from existing institutions, since it has none of the quality of a clean break with the past which the idea of an immediate World State and Pax Mundi involves, and more particularly since it neither abolishes nor has in it anything to shock fundamentally the princes, the diplomatists, the lawyers, the statesmen and politicians, the nationalists and suspicious people, since it gives them years in which to change and die out and reappear in new forms, and since at the same time it will command the support of every intelligent human being who gets his mind clear enough from his circumstances to understand its import, is a far more credible hope than the hope of anything coming de novo out of Hague Foundations or the manifest logic of the war.

But, of course, there weighs against these hopes the possibility that the Allied Powers are too various in their nature, too biased, too feeble intellectually and imaginatively, to hold together and maintain any institution for co-operation. The British Press may be too silly not to foster irritation and suspicion; we may get Carsonism on a larger scale trading on the resuscitation of dying hatreds; the British and Russian diplomatists may play annoying tricks upon one another by sheer force of habit. There may be many troubles of that sort. Even then I do not see that the hope of an ultimate world peace vanishes. But it will be a Roman world peace, made in Germany, and there will have to be several more great wars before it is established. Germany is too

homogeneous yet to have begun the lesson of compromise and the renunciation of the dream of national conquest. The Germans are a national, not an imperial people. France has learnt that through suffering, and Britain and Russia because for two centuries they have been imperial and not national systems. The German conception of world peace is as yet a conception of German ascendancy. The Allied conception becomes perforce one of mutual toleration.

But I will not press this inquiry farther now. It is, as I said at the beginning, a preliminary exploration of one of the great questions with which I propose to play in these articles. The possibility I have sketched is the one that most commends itself to me as probable. After a more detailed examination of the big operating forces at present working in the world, we may be in a position to revise these suggestions with a greater confidence and draw our net of probabilities a little tighter.