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The Appalling Waste of the European War

The Famous American Writer, Who Has Followed Many an Army in Previous Conflicts, Describes the Devastation and Desolation Observed by Him in the Tormented Lands of the Continent

In this war, more than in other campaigns, the wastefulness is apparent. In recent wars, what to the man at home was most distressing was the destruction of life. He measured the importance of the conflict by the daily lists of killed and wounded. But in those wars, except human life, there was little else to destroy. The war in South Africa was fought among hills of stone, across vacant stretches of prairie. Not even trees were destroyed, because there were no trees. In the district over which the armies passed there were not enough trees to supply the men with firewood. In Manchuria, with the Japanese, we marched for miles without seeing even a mud village, and the approaches to Port Arthur were as desolate as our Black Hills. The Italian-Turkish war was fought in the sands of a desert, and in the Balkan war few had heard of the cities bombarded until they read they were in flames. But this war is being waged in that part of the world best known to the rest of the world.

Every summer hundreds of thousands of Americans, on business or on pleasure bent, traveled to the places that now daily are being taken or retaken, or are in ruins. At school they had read of these places in their history book, and later had visited them. In consequence, in this war they have a personal and an intelligent interest. It is as though of what is being destroyed they were part owners.

A Generation of Wasters Has Its First Object Lesson in Waste

Toward Europe they are as absentee landlords. It was their pleasure ground, and their market. And now that it is being laid low the utter wastefulness of war is brought closer to this generation than ever before. Loss of life in war has not been considered entirely wasted, because the self-sacrifice involved ennobled it. And the men who went out to war knew what they might lose. Neither when, in the pursuits of peace, human life is sacrificed is it counted as wasted. The pioneers who were killed by the Indians, or who starved to death in what then were deserts, helped to carry civilization from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Only ten years ago men were killed in learning to control the "horseless wagons," and now 60-horsepower cars are driven by women and young girls. Later the airship took its toll of human life. Nor, in view of the possibilities of the airship in the future, can it be said those lives were wasted. But, except life, there was no other waste. To perfect the automobile and the airship no women were driven from home and the homes destroyed. No churches were bombarded. Men in this country who after many years had

built up a trade in Europe were not forced to close their mills and turn into the streets hundreds of working men and women.

The Expanding Kaiser Strikes Far Afield

It is in the by-products of the war that the waste, cruelty and stupidity of war are most apparent. It is the most innocent who suffer and those who have the least offended who are the most severely punished. The German Emperor wanted a place in the sun, and having decided that the right moment to seize it had arrived declared war. As a direct result, Mary Kelly, a telephone girl at the Wistaria Hotel, in New York, is looking for work. It sounds like an O. Henry story, but except for the name of the girl and the hotel it is not fiction. She told me about it yesterday, on Broadway.

"I'm looking for work," she said, "and I thought if you remembered me you might give me a reference. I used to work at Sherry's, and at the Wistaria Hotel. But I lost my job through the war." How the war in Europe could strike at a telephone girl in New York was puzzling, but Mary Kelly made it clear. "The Wistaria is very popular with Southerners," she explained. "They make their money in cotton, and blow it in New York. But now they can't sell their cotton, and so they have no money, and so they can't come to New York. And the hotel is run at a loss, and the proprietor discharged me and the other girl, and the bellboys are tending the switchboard. I've been a month trying to get work. But everybody gives me the same answer. They're cutting down the staff on account of the war. I've walked thirty miles a day looking for a job; and I'm nearly all in. How long do you think this war will last?" This telephone girl looking for work is a tiny by-product of war. She is only one instance of efficiency gone to waste.

Belgium and France Before the Days of Their Desolation

The reader can think of a hundred other instances. In his own life he can show where in his pleasures, his business, in his plans for the future the war has struck at him and has caused him inconvenience, loss or suffering. He can then appreciate how much greater are the loss and suffering to those who live within the zone of fire. In Belgium and France the vacant spaces are very few, and the shells fall among cities and villages lying so close together that they seem to touch hands. For hundreds of years the land has been cultivated, the fields, gardens, orchards tilled and lovingly cared for. The roads date back to the days of Cesar. The stone farmhouses, as well as the stone churches, were built to endure. And for centuries until this war came they had endured. After the battle of Waterloo some of these stone farmhouses found themselves famous. In them Napoleon or wellington had spread his maps or set up his cot, and until this war the farmhouses of Mont Saint Jean, of Caillou, of Haie Sainte, of the Belle Alliance, remained as they were on the day of the great battle a hundred years ago. They have received no special care, the elements have not spared them, nor caretakers guarded them. They still are used as dwellings, and it was only when you recognized them by having seen them on the postcards that you distinguished them from thousands of other houses, just as old and just as well preserved, that stretched from Brussels to Liege.

But a hundred years after this war those other houses will not be shown on picture postcards. King Albert and his staff may have spent the night in them, but the next day von Kluck and his army passed, and those houses, that had stood for three hundred years, were destroyed. In the papers you have seen many pictures of the shattered roofs, and the streets piled

high with fallen walls and lined with gaping cellars, over which once houses stood. The walls can be rebuilt, but what was wasted and which cannot be rebuilt are the labor, the saving, the sacrifices that made those houses not mere walls but homes. A house may be built in a year, or rented overnight; it takes longer than that to make it a home. The farmers and peasants in Belgium had spent many hours of many days in keeping their homes beautiful, in making their farms self-supporting. After the work of the day was finished they had planted gardens, had reared fruit trees, built arbors; under them, at meal time, they sat surrounded by those of their own household. To buy the horse and the cow they had pinched and saved; to make the gardens beautiful and the fields fertile they had sweated and slaved, the women as well as the men; even the watchdog by day was a beast of burden.

The Beautiful and the Useful Alike Sacrificed

When in August I reached Belgium between Brussels and Liege the whole countryside showed the labor of these peasants. Unlike the American farmer, they were too poor to buy machines to work for them, and with scythes and sickles in hand they cut the grain; with heavy flails they beat it. All that you saw on either side of the road that was fertile and beautiful was the result of their hard, unceasing, personal effort. Then the war came like a cyclone, and in three weeks the labor of many years was wasted. The fields were torn with shells, the grain was in flames, torches destroyed the villages, by the roadside were the carcasses of the cows that had been killed to feed the invader, and the horses were carried off harnessed to gray gun carriages. These were the things you saw on every side, from Brussels to the German border. The peasants themselves were huddled beneath bridges. They were like vast camps of gypsies, except that, less fortunate than the gypse, they had lost what he neither possesses nor desires, a home. As the enemy advanced the inhabitants of one village would fly for shelter to the next, only by the shells to be whipped further forward; and so, each hour growing in number, the refugees fled toward Brussels and the coast. They were an army of tramps, of women and children tramps, sleeping in the open fields, beneath the hayricks seeking shelter from the rain, living on the raw turnips and carrots they had plucked from the deserted vegetable gardens. The peasants were not the only ones who suffered. The rich and the noble born were as unhappy and as homeless. They had credit, and in the banks they had money, but they could not get at the money; and when a chateau and a farmhouse are in flames, between them there is little choice.

A Night Scene in Brussels, With War Stripped of Heroics

Three hours after midnight on the day the Germans began their three day's march through Brussels I had crossed the Square Rogier to send a dispatch by one of the many last trains for Ostend. When I returned to the Palace Hotel, seated on the iron chairs on the sidewalk were a woman, her three children and two maidservants. The woman was in mourning which was quite new, for though the war was only a month old many had been killed, among them her husband. The day before, at Tirlemont, shells had destroyed her chateau, and she was on her way to England. She had around her neck two long strings of peals, the maids each held a small handbag, her boy clasped in her arms a forlorn and sleepy fox terrier, and each of the little girls was embracing a bird cage. In one was a canary, in the other a parrot. That was all they had saved. In their way they were just as pathetic as the peasants sleeping under the hedges. They were just as homeless, friendless, just as much in need of food and sleep, and in their eyes was

the same look of fear and horror. Bernhardt tells his countrymen that war is glorious, heroic, and for a nation an economic necessity. Instead it is stupid, unintelligent. It creates nothing; it only wastes.

The Losses in Louvain Which No Chronicler Will Ever Record

If it confined itself to destroying forts and cradles of barbed wire then it would be sufficiently hideous. But it strikes blindly, brutally; it tramples on the innocent and the beautiful. It is the bull in the china shop, and the mad dog who snaps at children who are trying only to avoid him. People were incensed at the destruction in Louvain of the library, the Catholic college, the Church of St. Pierre that dated from the thirteenth century. These buildings belonged to the world, and over their loss the world was rightfully indignant, but in Louvain there were also shops and manufactories, hotels and private houses. Each belonged, not to the world, but to one family. These individual families made up a city of 45,000 people. In two days there was not a roof left to cover one of them. The trade those people had built up had been destroyed, the "goodwill and fixings," the stock on the shelves and in the storeroom, the goods in the shop windows, the portraits in the drawing room, the souvenirs and family heirlooms, the love letters, the bride's veil, the baby's first worsted shoes, and the will by which some one bequeathed to his beloved wife all his worldly goods.

War came and sent all these possessions, including the will and the worldly goods, up into the air in flames. Most of the people of Louvain made their living by manufacturing church ornaments and brewing beer. War was impartial, and destroyed both the beer and the church ornaments. It destroyed also the men who made them, and it drove the women and children into concentration camps. When first I visited Louvain it was a brisk, clean, prosperous city. The streets were spotless, the shop windows and cafes were modern, rich looking, inviting, and her great churches and hotel de ville gave to the city grace and dignity. Ten days later, when I again saw it, Louvain was in darkness, lit only by burning buildings. Rows and rows of streets were lined with black, empty walls. Louvain was a city of the past, another Pompeii, and her citizens were being led out to be shot. The fate of Louvain was the fate of Vise, of Malines, of Tirlemont, of Liege, of hundreds of villages and towns, and by the time this is printed it will be the fate of hundreds of other towns over all of Europe.

In this war the waste of horses is appalling. Those that first entered Brussels with the German army had been bred and trained for the purposes of war, and they were magnificent specimens. Every one who saw them exclaimed ungrudgingly in admiration. But by the time the army reached the approaches of Paris the forced marches had so depleted the stock of horses that for remounts the Germans were seizing all they met. Those that could not keep up were shot. For miles along the road from Meaux to Soissons and Rheims their bodies tainted the air.

Horses are Killed Because of Their Possible Usefulness

They had served their purposes, and after six weeks of campaigning the same animals that in times of peace would have proved faithful servants for many years were destroyed, that they might not fall into the hands of the French. Just as an artilleryman spikes his gun, the Germans on their retreat to the Aisne River left in their wake no horse that might assist in their pursuit. As they withdrew they searched each stable yard and killed the horses. In village after village I saw horses lying in the stalls or in the fields still wearing the harness of the plough, or in

groups of three or four in the yard of a barn, each with a bullet hole in its temple. They were killed for fear they might be useful.

Waste can go no further. Another example of waste were the motor trucks and automobiles. When the war began the motor trucks of the big department stores and manufacturers and motor buses of London, Paris and Berlin were taken over by the different armies. They had cost them from \$2,000 to \$3,000 each, and in times of peace had they been used for the purposes for which they were built would several times over have paid for themselves. But war gave them no time to pay even for their tires. You saw them by the roadside, cast aside like empty cigarette boxes. A few hours' tinkering would have set them right. They were still good for years of service. But an army in retreat or in pursuit has no time to waste in repairing motors. To waste the motor is cheaper.

Between Villers-Cotterets and Soissons the road was strewn with high power automobiles and motor trucks that the Germans had been forced to destroy. Something had gone wrong, something that at other times could easily had been mended. But with the French in pursuit there was no time to pause, nor could cars of such value be left to the enemy. So they had been set on fire or blown up or allowed to drive head-on into a stone wall or over an embankment. From the road above we could see them in the field below, lying like giant turtles on their backs. In one place in the forest of Villers was a line of fifteen trucks, each capable of carrying five tons. The gasoline to feed them had become exhausted, and the whole fifteen had been set on fire. In war this is necessary, but it was none the less waste. When an army takes the field it must consider first its own safety; and to embarrass the enemy everything else must be sacrificed. It cannot consider the feelings or pockets of railroad or telegraph companies. It cannot hesitate to destroy a bridge because that bridge cost \$500,000. And it does not hesitate.

Motoring from Paris to the front these days is a question of avoiding roads rendered useless because a broken bridge has cut them in half. All over France are these bridges of iron, of splendid masonry, some decorated with statues, some dating back hundreds of years, but now with a span blown out, or entirely destroyed and sprawling in the river. All of these material things—motor cars, stone bridges, railroad tracks, telegraph lines—can be replaced. Money can restore them. But money cannot restore the noble trees of France and Belgium, eighty years old or more, that shaded the roads, that made beautiful the parks and forests. For military purposes they have been cut down, or by artillery fire shattered into splinters. They will again grow, but eighty years is a long time to wait.

Losses Which are Unthinkable; Numbers That are Only Numbers

Nor can money replace the greatest waste of all—the waste in “killed, wounded and missing.” The waste of human life in this war is so enormous, so far beyond our daily experience, that disasters less appalling are much easier to understand. The loss of three people in an automobile accident comes nearer home than the fact that at the battle of Sezanne thirty thousand men were killed. Few of us are trained to think of men in such numbers. Certainly not of dead men in such numbers. We have seen thirty thousand men together only during the world's series, or at the championship football matches. To get an idea of the waste of this war we must imagine all of the spectators at a football match between Yale and Harvard suddenly stricken dead. We must think of all the wives, children, friends affected by the loss of those thirty thousand, and we must multiply those thirty thousand by hundreds, and imagine these hundreds of thousands lying dead in Belgium, in Alsace-Lorraine and within ten miles of Paris. After the

Germans were repulsed at Meaux and at Sezanne the dead of both armies were so many that they lay intermingled in layers three and four deep. They were buried in long pits and piled on top of each other like cigars in a box. Lines of fresh earth so long that you mistook them for trenches intended to conceal regiments were in reality graves. Some bodies lay for days uncovered until they had lost all human semblance. They were so many you ceased to regard them even as corpses. They had become just a part of the waste, a part of the shattered walls, uprooted trees and fields ploughed by shells. What once had been your fellow men were only bundles of clothes, swollen and shapeless, like scarecrows stuffed with rags, polluting the air.

“The Giving Over of a Game That Must Be Lost”

The wounded were hardly less pitiful. They were so many and so thickly did they fall that the ambulance service at first was not sufficient to handle them. They lay in the fields or forests sometimes for a day before they were picked up suffering unthinkable agony. And after they were placed in cars and started back toward Paris the tortures continued. Some of the trains of wounded that arrived outside the city had not been opened in two days. The wounded had been without food or water. They had not been able to move from the positions in which in torment they had thrown themselves. The foul air had produced gangrene. And when the cars were opened the stench was so fearful that the Red Cross people fell back as though from a blow. For the wounded Paris is full of hospitals—French, English and American. And the hospitals are full of splendid men. Each one once had been physically fit, or he would not have been passed to the front, and those among them who are officers are finely bred, finely educated, or they would not be officers. But each matched his good health, his good breeding and knowledge against a broken piece of shell or steel bullet and the shell or bullet won. They always will win. Stephen Crane called a wound “the red badge of courage.” It is all of that. And the man who wears that badge has all my admiration. But I cannot help feeling also the waste of it. I would have a standing army for the same excellent reason that I insure my house; but, except in self-defence, no war. For war—and I have seen a lot of it, is waste. And waste is unintelligent.