

THE WAR FOR THE WORLD.

By Israel Zangwill. New York:
The Macmillan Company, 1916.

It may be that the war, with its unsettling of preconceived ideas and its demand that facts of a hitherto unconceived frightfulness be squarely faced, has somewhat affected our sense of literary values. Any theme connected with the war, at all events, seems at present too grave for eloquence, too grave for mere criticism, too grave for a literary manner, too grave to admit of anything except the discussion of facts and causes and remedies. In view of this, it would not be strange if a number of persons should experience a certain impatience in attempting to read Israel Zangwill's, *The War for the World*. Mr. Zangwill's burning earnestness seems almost like levity; the caustic sarcasm he habitually uses in the interest of high ideals—unwilling, perhaps, that the devil should have all the fine sarcasm to himself—seems in this case somewhat out of place; his manner—a manner as elaborate as that of literary controversy—is even irritating. To be sure, it is good for us sometimes to be irritated, because we need to be stung to action; but to be told through a series of brilliant and artfully pointed paragraphs, and through striking metaphors, that civilization is at stake in the present war, that no nation can afford to become Prussianized, that competition in armaments is ghastly foolishness, that arbitration will not prevent nations from flying at one another's throats, is in this third year of the European conflict simply nerve-racking.

Such a thing, too, as Mr. Zangwill's essay upon "Rosy Russia" seems somewhat more bitter and somewhat less informing than the kind of discourse about Russia one would, in the mood induced by the war, desire to read. Mr. Zangwill is perhaps right in believing that the attractive picture of Russia which is just now being rather persistently held up to the world is in some respects false or exaggerated. Yet the facts he adduces hardly suffice to remove the impression which certain apparently well-informed books have produced that in Russia there is splendid human material and that a transformation is going on there which may mean much to civilization. Further than this in the idealization of Russia few of us are probably inclined to go. It is not likely that Mr. Stephen Graham, for instance, has deluded many Americans into making a fetish of Holy Russia or into growing unduly sentimental over the Russian *moujik*. It is probable, on the contrary, that this writer by revealing some traits of the Russian peasant that are deserving of admiration or sympathy has really benefited the world. It is unfortunate that Mr. Zangwill should have thought proper to quote against Mr. Graham, who happens to be Scotch, those sneering lines of Defoe's about the "True-born Englishman." It is true that Mr. Zangwill's wrath on this occasion is excited not primarily by Mr. Graham's view of the Russians, but by Mr. Graham's attitude toward the Russian Jews. But whatever the provocation, the passage is regrettable.

The fundamental defect in Mr. Zangwill's essays is that, while they very effectively emphasize principles and very skillfully disentangle logical snarls, they seldom go deeply into causes. Thus his discussions not infrequently issue either in truisms or in somewhat arbitrary assertions. The statement that "the love of law must yield to the law of love" is uncontrovertible if the Christian ideal is true—though perhaps not everyone would feel obliged to accept as an immediate inference the conclusion that "if Germany desires of our [British] territory she must have it." The statement that for those who question whether or not it is right to kill men in a national cause the answer "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's" is sufficient, is, to say the least, debatable.

There is good thought in Mr. Zangwill's essays: ethically, the author is usually clairvoyant. There is suggestive thought in them; the whole discussion of the place and function of the Church, for example, is full of insight. Characteristically keen, too, is Mr. Zangwill's argument that the extension of liberty which the granting of female suffrage would mean is particularly needed in England now, since victory or defeat may equally bring a "wave of militarism, of conscription, of further reduction of liberty." There are brilliancies of phrase in the essays without number—pointed ironies, witty formulations of truth. To those who, in reading of war-themes, can concentrate their minds upon ethical preachments, upon thought-provoking suggestions, upon verbal brilliancies, this book of Mr. Zangwill's will prove edifying.