

England in War

By

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WHAT a great war is and means it is not easy for an American born since the Civil War fully to understand. Before landing at Liverpool, I had, of course, read everything I could get about the war. Like everyone else, I knew what enormous battles had been fought and what vast losses had been sustained. But still I did not realize the gigantic fact of war. Most of my countrymen, I do not doubt, are in the same mental position. So little, indeed, do our people realize what war implies that the American Legation at Brussels has had to provide itself with rubber stamps which read: "A state of war exists in Belgium," because men and women constantly write over and ask for things which are wholly impossible because war does exist.

The actual fact of war was the strangest impression made upon me during the first few days in England.

The outward evidences of a nation at war are plentiful in London. Soldiers are everywhere. Columns of armed men and columns of recruits still in civilian clothes march through the streets. Drilling goes on in the parks and other places all day and every day. The shop windows are full of articles for use at the front. War fills the papers and monopolizes conversation. But all this fails to make war really felt. None of these, nor the posters calling for enlist-

ment which cover every wall, appear in every shop window, flash across whole blocks of buildings, and decorate every taxi cab, nor the darkened streets at night, nor the supply of candles in the house against the time when a Zeppelin raid may require the cutting-off of the electric light, are sufficient to bring home completely the actual fact of war. What finally does it are the faces and the talk of the women.

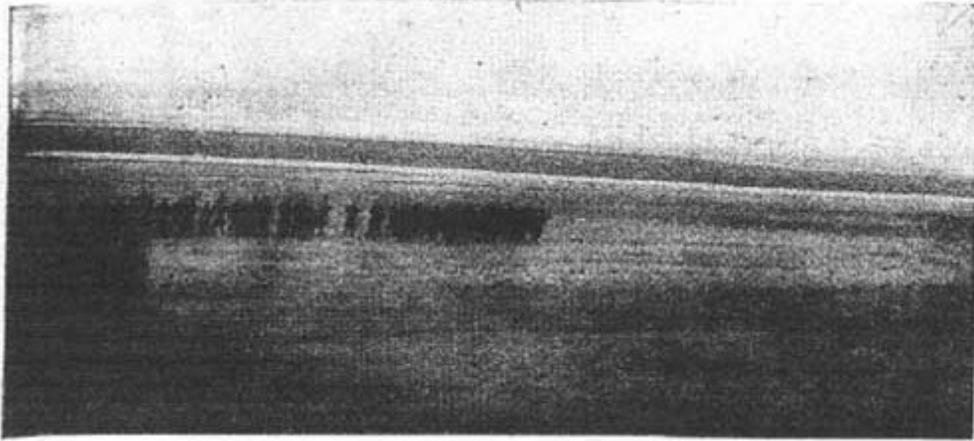
There is no parade of suffering whatever. I have scarcely seen a crape veil since I landed. Talk goes on about the men who have been killed, or who are wounded, or prisoners, or (worst of all for the women) who are missing, and it goes on as much as possible in the ordinary tone and way. Complaint is altogether absent. Every woman appears to be doing all she can to help, and every one is giving what she has. For in this war

every family, at least among the richer classes, has given its men to the service of the nation.

After two weeks in England, during which I have taken pains to inquire, I have learned the name of but one single Englishman of the so-called leisure class and of military age who is not engaged in the war. As soldiers, or, when they cannot pass the physical examination, as civilians, all of the men of prominence and position are doing what they can. Two



The French "ant" army. Sappers at work on new trenches



Marching across Nieuport sands bound for the front.

British admirals of seventy years, long since retired on their pensions, have, for example, taken to the sea again, not as admirals in the active service of the Navy, for that is evidently impossible, but as lieutenants, and both are engaged in the dangerous work of sweeping for mines.

But it is far from true that the leisure class alone shows this temper toward the war. The bone and sinew of England, you hear on every side, is in Kitchener's army. Mechanics, clerks, small business men, the successful in all the active occupations which lead to success, are the men who fill the ranks. What strikes the casual observer about the bodies of troops who pass in the streets is the obvious high level of physique and intelligence both.

Such spirit among the men of England is admirable, but even more so is the spirit of the women. Over and over again I have heard women say of their men, "We can stand it if they go, but we could not stand it if they stayed at home."

At the end of a recent call upon an American lady, during which no word was said of her bereavement, an English woman advanced in years replied to an inquiry about her eldest son: "My husband and I have been highly distinguished. Our son has died for his country."

To me by far the most striking fact in England is the total absence of bitterness against the Germans, either as a people or as individuals. Full discussion of German methods of warfare I have heard daily, almost hourly, and strong condemnation, but no bitterness or abuse. Full and generous recognition is everywhere given to German courage and German efficiency. Although the whole nation is profoundly convinced that it is fighting for its liberties and its economic existence against a system of military absolutism, there seems to be no bitter-

ness at all. At least I have found none. There can be no stronger evidence than this that the English believe their quarrel to be just.

There is another phase of the situation in England which deserves special mention. It is this: No Englishman of influence desires anything but strict neutrality on the part of the United States. Although they believe themselves to be fighting the fight of democracy against the effort of a military autocracy, to control, if not to rule the world, and although they believe this to be in the last analysis our fight as much as theirs,

their faith in democracy being the same as ours, still there is no desire on their part that we should take upon ourselves any active share of the burden of the war.

But there is bewilderment, and not a little sense of regret, over what the average intelligent Englishman regards as our failure to realize the facts. He says:

"England went into this war on a great question of principle, much as you Americans went into the war with Spain. We went to war to ensure the safety of small neutral states in the future, and to enforce respect for the obligations of treaties. We cannot understand why America did not lend the enormous weight of her influence to the cause of international morality by protesting against the violation of Belgium.

"But let that pass. What seems incredible to us now, is that you in America apparently do not see how England is fighting to prevent democracy from being overwhelmed in Europe. We have nothing against the German people, but we cannot permit the Prussian system of military bondage to set the pace for the whole world. If we are beaten, the United States will be next in the way of German expansion and will have to surrender or fight. Of course you will not surrender. That being so, England has a right to the whole-hearted sympathy of the American people.

"In general you Americans understand that we are right, but you do not realize what we are giving for the cause of liberty. We do not see why you Americans should not be willing for a time even to lose a little trade in this great war, which we English are fighting to protect and establish your own principles, and in which you are losing nothing else."

This is the Englishman's point of view, and the fact that he is backing his convictions with an army of two or three million fighting men gives weight to his words.