

In Memoriam, 1914

THE Venetian commonwealth once inscribed on the walls of its armory the words: "Happy is that city which in times of peace thinks of war." And we have had our own admonitions to the same effect. Well, we are back, just fifteen years after outbreak of the most disastrous war in history, in the piping time of peace that once we thought the world would never recapture. We have again our merry meetings and our delightful measures, and a new generation that knows no more of what the older witnessed than that older knew of the internecine struggle that meant "War" to its members. Truly, it behooves us again to prepare for war. It is none too soon to bend every effort to that endeavor, to leave no agency unused that may conduce to its elimination from the world forever. In reversal of all problems, speech, not silence, henceforth is golden. Those reticences of the trenches which seemed so necessary to a world whose nerves were raw with agony, that reliance on the exhaustion which made wholesale fighting within any discernible time seem inconceivable, have alike become dangerous. For if the men who knew what the horror of battle was hold silence until only those who never experienced write of it, and if peace propaganda lies inert until full strength has returned to the nations, then war again will have glamour, and pacifism only a blank slate to work upon.

Fortunately the soldiers at least seem to have determined that if they have anything to say about it war shall be known as what it is: Of a sudden there is an avalanche of volumes written by soldiers, books so impregnated with hatred of warfare and so unsparing in their portrayal of it that to read them is to disavow all apologia for battle. "All Quiet on the Western Front," "War," "The Path to Glory," one after another they appear; they are more effective propaganda for peace than a thousand tracts or arguments. Literature needs them when they are good, but the world needs them even more. And what the world needs in addition is a very full realization of the fact that warfare never was anything but hideous and never will be anything other. It needs some constant reminder that the Wars of the Roses or Napoleon's campaigns are only romantic in fiction, and that unless it be wary fiction will begin investing the World War with glamour. It needs some custodian to cry out upon any such effort, and that custodian can only be the public conscience.