

V A N I T Y F A I R

December, 1917

New York City in War Time

*The Dynamo That Provides
the Energy Upon Which the
Great Struggle Depends*

AN ingenious person put forward the theory some years ago that New York was hardly American at all. He called the town the most European of American cities, the most American of European cities, and let the piece of smartness go at that. He would hardly say it now, for he would find all around him indications that the generalization meant just nothing at all, and was indeed nothing more or less than a silly fallacy, which ignored the immense force which the place exercises on all those who come under its metropolitan influence.

New York in war time has revealed herself in her true light. She has shown an adaptability to strange and trying conditions which has surprised even those who knew her best, or who thought that they knew her best. She stands for the very "efficiency"—to use a good word spoiled by the Germans—which is considered everywhere to be a particularly American gift and accomplishment. At the present moment she is doing more than her share in the big job undertaken by the nation, and doing it with absolute calm, self-possession and absence of bluster.

WASHINGTON may give itself airs as the seat of the national government. With Congress in almost continual session that interesting centre of diplomacy and legislation has small chance of becoming the wilderness that it used to revert to every time the crowds of official persons departed for home, when the Senate and House shut up shop for the vacation. Washington is very busy, and it all shows on the surface, on Pennsylvania Avenue and around the Departments. But those who know are quite well aware that the real centre of things, that the big dynamo that conveys the energy, is in New York.

Already the greatest manufacturing centre in the world, our coming into the War made New York the money centre, the distributing centre, the very hub of the universe as far as resources were concerned. London and Paris sank to the level of mere distributing points. Wall Street has shorn Lombard Street of its glory. If the Kaiser is a bad sleeper, and he ought to be, he must be haunted in the mid-hours of the night by visions of the skyscrapers of lower Manhattan Island, for they symbolize the staying power which he should dread most of all.

IN the Civil War they used to talk about so-and-so as a "War Governor." Nowadays we talk about New York's present city executive as "the War Mayor." This in itself is significant of the extent to which a new importance has become attached to an office which used to have only local interest. Only a few weeks ago the most eminent statesmen of the nation, belonging to the two great parties, agreed in declaring that a New York city election involved a national and an international issue, and that it would be a calamity if a defective primary law resulted in the removal of the right man from the right place.

The town has seen Foreign Missions come formally and go away informally. But what

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was not so evident was that each important one left behind it a regular establishment. Thousands of Frenchmen are looking after the business of our ally France in the big office presided over by M. Pardiéu, and thousands of Englishmen are attending to the business of our ally Great Britain in the offices controlled by Lord Northcliffe. And all this intense activity in New York is based on the excellent principle that the Allies will have to hang together if they don't want to hang separately.

BEFORE the war the immense machinery of New York was just sufficient for the work put upon it. The hanging out of service flags on every big office building in the financial district—indicating so many men gone to join the colors—did not put the works out of gear. Thousands upon thousands of women are now sitting at desks formerly occupied by members of the other sex, and so the complacent dictum that the place of the feminine person is in the home has received another blow in the solar plexus.

They used to say that New Yorkers were so busy making money that they had no heart for anything that was not connected, directly or indirectly, with that interesting and absorbing occupation. But they have developed a great fondness for pageants, of which we have had many this year. These were not ornamental displays, but had a deep and serious meaning. It was noticeable that as time went on these were watched with greater and greater interest by the very foreign part of the population which was supposed to have least sympathy with the symbolism which appealed to New Yorkers with roots deep in the soil.

THE one above all others which made people sit up was the Red Cross demonstration, when some fifteen thousand women marched down Fifth Avenue behind H. P. Davison, one of many distinguished men of affairs who are now working in New York for the Government at a salary of one dollar a year. It was a bewildering proof of the manner in which New Yorkers of every sort—women of fashion, professional women, working women and just ordinary women—had got to work, almost without mentioning it to their men relatives, to help in the organization of one of the most important parts of a modern army. No suffrage parade that ever passed down the same thoroughfare could have had the same effect in bringing conviction to the doubters who had wondered if it would not be just as well to postpone the question of equal justice to all, irrespective of sex, or previous condition of servitude, until after the war was over. The nurses "ready to go," and those who would soon be ready to go, had a real importance to those who had given sons and brothers to help to fill the ranks of the National Army.

New York has accepted the conditions of war with complacent interest. Our once civilian streets are full of variety. It seems natural that one should be able to pick out a dozen different foreign military uniforms in a walk between 42nd Street and the Plaza. A young lady of society in the service togs of the auxiliary corps to which she is attached caused only a moment's surprise. The first war tank from the trenches to go up the Avenue made a sensation. The next one, which may be an American tank, will be hailed as a familiar and friendly sight. (*Continued on page 126*)

THE democratic spirit of the war is everywhere. Nobody is surprised to see a general or a colonel riding on a street car, or a couple of tars from the fleet taking their ease in a motor-car. A big machine flashes by, driven by a boy in the white cap of a full private of the Naval Reserve. You know that somebody's son is making the best of the time that remains to him, before he bids good bye to the minor joys of existence, and goes to do his duty.

There were those who looked forward to our participation in hostilities with apprehension and alarm. All sorts of things were to happen. But never before was it necessary to keep so few policemen on post in the various parts of the city. Outside the traffic

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regulation not many of Commissioner Woods' patrolmen were to be seen. Yet there was a feeling of confidence. People didn't inquire what the force was doing, or what special duties could be keeping them out of sight. It was only necessary to reflect that, with wise foresight, the New York authorities had raised a small army of civilian guards who were quite capable of relieving the regular police.

A FAMILIAR local legend has been knocked into a cocked-hat. It was accepted as a fact that there could be no interference, or successful interference, with the after-the-theatre habits of New Yorkers, who were famous for their disinclination to go to bed while it was still only the "shank of the evening." The law called for the closing of bars and restaurants at 1 o'clock. It was always argued that, as the country legislators of the State made such regulations without as much as finding out what New York needed or desired, the simplest way was to administer the statute in a manner suitable to local habits, such as had always been followed.

But when war came, Mayor Mitchel issued a proclamation, cutting off all-night licenses, and appealed to all those immediately concerned to co-operate with him in the drastic enforcement of the letter of the law. The result was that for the first time in the memory of living man, nobody had any excuse for staying up later than he ought to, for the order was obeyed universally. Behind the Mayor was the public opinion of New York, and so the impossible was turned into an accomplished fact.



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