

## Chapter 1

# Statement of the economic case for war

Where can the Anglo-German rivalry of armaments end? — Why peace advocacy fails— Why it deserves to fail— The attitude of the peace advocate— The presumption that the prosperity of nations depends upon their political power, and consequent necessity of protection against aggression of other nations who would diminish our power to their advantage— These the universal axioms of international politics.

IT is generally admitted that the present rivalry in armaments in Europe — notably such as that now in progress between England and Germany — cannot go on in its present form indefinitely. The net result of each side meeting the efforts of the other with similar efforts is that at the end of a given period the relative position of each is what it was originally, and the enormous sacrifices of both have gone for nothing. If as between England and Germany it is claimed that England is in a position to maintain the lead because she has the money, Germany can retort that she is in a position to maintain the lead because she has the population, which must, in the case of a highly organized European nation, in the end mean money. Meanwhile, neither side can yield to the other, as the one so doing would, it is felt, be placed at the mercy of the other, a situation which neither will accept.

There are two current solutions which are offered as a means of egress from this *impasse*. There is that of the smaller party, regarded in both countries for the most part as one of dreamers and doctrinaires, who hope to solve the problem by a resort to general disarmament, or, at least, a limitation of armament by agreement. And there is that of the larger, which is esteemed the more practical party, of those who are persuaded that the present state of rivalry and recurrent irritation is bound to culminate in an armed conflict, which, by definitely reducing one or other of the parties to a position of manifest inferiority, will settle the thing for at least some time, until after a longer or shorter period a state of relative equilibrium is established, and the whole process will be recommenced *da capo*.

This second solution is, on the whole, accepted as one of the laws of life: one of the hard facts of existence which men of ordinary courage take as all in the day's work. And in every country those favouring the other solution are looked upon either as people who fail to realize the hard facts of the world in which they live, or as people less concerned with the security of their country than with upholding a somewhat emasculate ideal; ready to weaken the defences of their own country on no better assurance than that the prospective enemy will not be so wicked as to attack them.

To this the virile man is apt to oppose the law of conflict. Most of what the nineteenth century has taught us of the evolution of life on the planet is pressed into the service of this struggle-for-life philosophy. We are reminded of the survival of the fittest, that the weakest go to the wall, and that all life, sentient and

non-sentient, is but a life of battle. The sacrifice involved in armament is the price which nations pay for their safety and for their political power. The power of England has been the main condition of her past industrial success; her trade has been extensive and her merchants rich, because she has been able to make her political and military force felt, and to exercise her influence among all the nations of the world. If she has dominated the commerce of the world, it is because her unconquered navy has dominated, and continues to dominate, all the avenues of commerce. This is the currently accepted argument.

The fact that Germany has of late come to the front as an industrial nation, making giant strides in general prosperity and well-being, is deemed also to be the result of *her* military successes and the increasing political power which she is coming to exercise in Continental Europe. These things, alike in England and in Germany, are accepted as the axioms of the problem, as the citations given in the next chapter sufficiently prove. I am not aware that a single authority of note, at least in the world of workaday politics, has ever challenged or disputed them. Even those who have occupied prominent positions in the propaganda of peace are at one with the veriest fire eaters on this point. Mr W. T. Stead was one of the leaders of the big navy party in England. Mr Frederic Harrison, who all his life had been known as the philosopher protagonist of peace, declared recently that, if England allowed Germany to get ahead of her in the race for armaments, "famine, social anarchy, incalculable chaos in the industrial and financial world, would be the inevitable result. Britain may live on ... but before she began to live freely again she would have to lose half her population, which she could not feed, and all her overseas Empire, which she could not defend. . . . How idle are fine words about retrenchment, peace, and brotherhood, whilst we lie open to the risk of unutterable ruin, to a deadly fight for national existence, to war in its most destructive and cruel form." On the other side we have friendly critics of England, like Professor von Schulze Gaevernitz, writing: "We want our [i.e. Germany's] navy in order to confine the commercial rivalry of England within innocuous limits, and to deter the sober sense of the English people from the extremely threatening thought of attack upon us. ... The German navy is a condition of our bare existence and independence, like the daily bread on which we depend not only for ourselves, but for our children."

Confronted by a situation of this sort, one is bound to feel that the ordinary argument of the pacifist entirely breaks down; and it breaks down for a very simple reason. He himself accepts the premise which has just been indicated —viz., that the victorious party in the struggle for political predominance gains some material advantage over the party which is conquered. The proposition even to the pacifist seems so self-evident that he makes no effort to combat it. He pleads his case otherwise. "It cannot be denied, of course," says one peace advocate, "that the thief does secure some material advantage by his theft. What we plead is that if the two parties were to devote to honest labour the time and energy devoted to preying upon each other, the permanent gain would more than offset the occasional booty." Some pacifists go further, and take the ground that there is a conflict between the natural law and the moral law, and that we must choose the moral even to our hurt. Thus Mr Edward Grubb writes:

Self-preservation is not the final law for nations any more than for individuals. . . . The progress of humanity may demand the extinction (in this world) of the individual, and it may demand also the example and the inspiration of a martyr nation. So long as the Divine providence has need of us, Christian faith requires that we shall trust for our safety to the unseen but real forces of right dealing, truthfulness, and love; but, should the will of God demand it, we must be prepared, as Jeremiah taught his nation long ago, to give up even our national life for furthering those great ends “to which the whole creation moves.”

This may be “fanaticism,” but, if so, it is the fanaticism of Christ and of the prophets, and we are willing to take our places along with them.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing is really the keynote of much pacifist propaganda. In our own day, Count Tolstoi has even expressed anger at the suggestion that any reaction against militarism, on other than moral grounds, can be efficacious.

The peace advocate pleads for “altruism” in international relationships, and in so doing admits that successful war may be to the interest, though the immoral interest, of the victorious party. That is why the “inhumanity” of war bulks so largely in his propaganda, and why he dwells so much upon its horrors and cruelties.

It thus results that the workaday world and those engaged in the rough and tumble of practical politics have come to look upon the peace ideal as a counsel of perfection, which may one day be attained when human nature, as the common phrase is, has been improved out of existence, but not while human nature remains what it is. While it remains possible to seize a tangible advantage by a man’s strong right arm the advantage will be seized, and woe betide the man who cannot defend himself.

Nor is this philosophy of force either as conscienceless, as brutal, or as ruthless as its common statement would make it appear. We know that in the world as it exists today, in spheres other than those of international rivalry, the race is to the strong, and the weak get scant consideration. Industrialism and commercialism are as full of cruelties as war itself—cruelties, indeed, that are longer drawn out, more refined, though less apparent, and, it may be, appealing less to the common imagination than those of war. With whatever reticence we may put the philosophy into words, we all feel that conflict of interests in this world is inevitable, and that what is an incident of our daily lives should not be shirked as a condition of those occasional titanic conflicts which mould the history of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> “The True Way of Life” (Headley Brothers, London), p. 29. I am aware that many modern pacifists, even of the English school, to which these remarks mainly apply, are more objective in their advocacy than Mr Grubb, but in the eyes of the “average sensual man” pacifism is still deeply tainted with this self-sacrificing altruism (see Chapter III., Part III.), notwithstanding the admirable work of the French pacifist school.

The virile man doubts whether he ought to be moved by the plea of the "inhumanity" of war. The masculine mind accepts suffering, death itself, as a risk which we are all prepared to run even in the most unheroic forms of money-making; none of us refuses to use the railway train because of the occasional smash, to travel because of the occasional shipwreck, and so on. Indeed, peaceful industry demands a heavier toll even in blood than does a war, fact which the casualty statistics in railroading, fishing, mining and seamanship, eloquently attest; while such peaceful industries as fishing and shipping are the cause of as much brutality.<sup>2</sup> The peaceful administration of the tropics takes as heavy a toll in the health and lives of good men, and much of it, as in the West of Africa, involves, unhappily, a moral deterioration of human character as great as that which can be put to the account of war.

Beside these peace sacrifices the "price of war" is trivial, and it is felt that the trustees of a nation's interests ought not to shrink from paying that price should the efficient protection of those interests demand it. If the common man is prepared, as we know he is, to risk his life in a dozen dangerous trades and professions for no object higher than that of improving his position or increasing his income, why should the statesman shrink from such sacrifices as the average war demands, if thereby the great interests which have been confided to him can be advanced? If it be true, as even the pacifist admits that it may be true, that the tangible material interests of a nation can be advanced by warfare; if, in other words, warfare can play some large part in the protection of the interests of humanity, the rulers of a courageous people are justified in disregarding the suffering and the sacrifice that it may involve.

Of course, the pacifist falls back upon the moral plea: we have no right to take by force. But here again the common sense of ordinary humanity does not follow the peace advocate. If the individual manufacturer is entitled to use all the advantages which great financial and industrial resources may give him against a less powerful competitor, if he is entitled, as under our present industrial scheme he is entitled, to overcome competition by a costly and perfected organization of manufacture, of advertisement, of salesmanship, in a trade in which poorer men gain their livelihood, why should not the nation be entitled to overcome the rivalry of other nations by utilizing the force of its public services? It is

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<sup>2</sup> The *Matin* newspaper recently made a series of revelations, in which it was shown that the master of a French cod-fishing vessel had, for some trivial insubordinations, disembowelled his cabin-boy alive, and put salt into the intestines, and then thrown the quivering body into the hold with the cod-fish. So injured were the crew to brutality that they did not effectively protest, and the incident was only brought to light months later by wine-shop chatter. The *Matin* quotes this as the sort of brutality that marks the Newfoundland cod-fishing industry in French ships.

Again, the German Socialist papers have recently been dealing with what they term "The Casualties of the Industrial Battlefield" showing that the losses from industrial accidents since 1870 —the loss of life during peace, that is —have been enormously greater than the losses due to the Franco-Prussian War.

a commonplace of industrial competition that the “big man” takes advantage of all the weaknesses of the small man —his narrow means, his ill-health even— to undermine and to undersell. If it were true that industrial competition were always merciful, and national or political competition always cruel, the plea of the peace man might be unanswerable; but we know, as a matter of fact, that this is not the case, and, returning to our starting-point, the common man feels that he is obliged to accept the world as he finds it, that struggle and warfare, in one form or another, are among the conditions of life, conditions which he did not make. Moreover he is not at all sure that the warfare of arms is necessarily either the hardest or the most cruel form of that struggle which exists throughout the universe. In any case, he is willing to take the risks, because he feels that military predominance gives him a real and tangible advantage, a material advantage translatable into terms of general social well-being, by enlarged commercial opportunities, wider markets, protection against the aggression of commercial rivals, and so on. He faces the risk of war in the same spirit as that in which a sailor or a fisherman faces the risk of drowning, or a miner that of the choke damp, or a doctor that of a fatal disease, because he would rather take the supreme risk than accept for himself and his dependents a lower situation, a narrower and meaner existence, with complete safety. He also asks whether the lower path is altogether free from risks. If he knows much of life he knows that in very many circumstances the bolder way is the safer way.

That is why it is that the peace propaganda has so signally failed, and why the public opinion of the countries of Europe, far from restraining the tendency of their Governments to increase armaments, is pushing them into still greater expenditure. It is universally assumed that national power means national wealth, national advantage; that expanding territory means increased opportunity for industry; that the strong nation can guarantee opportunities for its citizens that the weak nation cannot. The Englishman, for instance, believes that his wealth is largely the result of his political power, of his political domination, mainly of his sea power; that Germany with her expanding population must feel cramped; that she must fight for elbow-room; and that if he does not defend himself he will illustrate that universal law which makes of every stomach a graveyard. He has a natural preference for being the diner rather than the dinner. As it is universally admitted that wealth and prosperity and well-being go with strength and power and national greatness, he intends, so long as he is able, to maintain that strength and power and greatness, and not to yield it even in the name of altruism. And he will not yield it, because should he do so it, would be simply to replace British power and greatness by the power and greatness of some other nation, which he feels sure would do no more for the well-being of civilization as a whole than he is prepared to do. He is persuaded that he can no more yield in the competition of armaments, than as a business man or as a manufacturer he could yield in commercial competition to his rival; that he must fight out his salvation under conditions as he finds them, since he did not make them, and since he cannot change them.

Admitting his premises —and these premises are the universally accepted axioms of international politics the world over— who shall say that he is wrong?