

**WHY MEN FIGHT: A
METHOD OF ABOLISHING
THE INTERNATIONAL DUEL**

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Why men fight: a method of abolishing the international duel by Bertrand Russell

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WHY MEN FIGHT

*A METHOD OF ABOLISHING
THE INTERNATIONAL DUEL*

BY
Earl Russell

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Le souffle, le rythme, la vraie force populaire manqua à la réaction. Elle eut les rois, les trésors, les armées; elle écrasa les peuples, mais elle resta muette. Elle tua en silence; elle ne put parler qu'avec le canon sur ses horribles champs de bataille. . . . Tuer quinze millions d'hommes par la faim et l'épée, à la bonne heure, cela se peut. Mais faire un petit chant, un air aimé de tous, voilà ce que nulle machination ne donnera. . . . Don réservé, béni. . . . Ce chant peut-être à l'aube jaillira d'un cœur simple, ou l'alouette le trouvera en montant au soleil, de son sillon d'avril.

MICHELET.

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WHY MEN FIGHT

I

THE PRINCIPLE OF GROWTH

TO all who are capable of new impressions and fresh thought, some modification of former beliefs and hopes has been brought by the war. What the modification has been has depended, in each case, upon character and circumstance; but in one form or another it has been almost universal. To me, the chief thing to be learnt through the war has been a certain view of the springs of human action, what they are, and what we may legitimately hope that they will become. This view, if it is true, seems to afford a basis for political philosophy more capable of standing erect in a time of crisis than the philosophy of traditional Liberalism has shown itself to be. The following lectures, though only one of them will deal with war, all are inspired by a view of the springs of action

which has been suggested by the war. 'And all of them are informed by the hope of seeing such political institutions established in Europe as shall make men averse to war—a hope which I firmly believe to be realizable, though not without a great and fundamental reconstruction of economic and social life.

To one who stands outside the cycle of beliefs and passions which make the war seem necessary, an isolation, an almost unbearable separation from the general activity, becomes unavoidable. At the very moment when the universal disaster raises compassion in the highest degree, compassion itself compels aloofness from the impulse to self-destruction which has swept over Europe. The helpless longing to save men from the ruin towards which they are hastening makes it necessary to oppose the stream, to incur hostility, to be thought unfeeling, to lose for the moment the power of winning belief. It is impossible to prevent others from feeling hostile, but it is possible to avoid any reciprocal hostility on one's own part, by imaginative understanding and the sympathy which grows out of it. And without understanding and sympathy it is impossible to find a cure for the evil from which the world is suffering.

There are two views of the war neither of which seems to me adequate. The usual view in this country is that it is due to the wickedness of the Germans; the view of most pacifists is that it is due to the diplomatic tangle and to the ambitions of Governments. I think both these views fail to realize the extent to which war grows out of ordinary human nature. Germans, and also the men who compose Governments, are on the whole average human beings, actuated by the same passions that actuate others, not differing much from the rest of the world except in their circumstances. War is accepted by men who are neither Germans nor diplomatists with a readiness, an acquiescence in untrue and inadequate reasons, which would not be possible if any deep repugnance to war were widespread in other nations or classes. The untrue things which men believe, and the true things which they disbelieve, are an index to their impulses—not necessarily to individual impulses in each case (since beliefs are contagious), but to the general impulses of the community. We all believe many things which we have no good ground for believing, because, subconsciously, our nature craves certain kinds of action which these beliefs would render reas-