

**PEACEMAKERS, BLESSED AND
OTHERWISE: OBSERVATIONS,
REFLECTIONS, AND IRRITATIONS
AT AN INTERACTIONAL
CONFERENCE**

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Peacemakers, Blessed and Otherwise: Observations, Reflections, and Irritations at an Interactional Conference by Ida Minerva Tarbell

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*Observations, Reflections and Irritations
at an International Conference*

PEACEMAKERS BLESSED AND OTHERWISE

CHAPTER I

PRE-CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS

WHEN one attempts to set down, with any degree of candor, his impressions of a great gathering like the Conference on the Limitation of Armament, he will find himself swayed from amusement to irritation, from hope to despair, from an interest in the great end to an interest in the game as it is being played. My hopes and interests and irritations over the Washington Conference began weeks before it was called. What could it do? All around me men and women were saying, "It will end war," and

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possibly—so deep was the demand in them that war be ended—believing what they said. It has always been one of the singular delusions of people with high hopes that if nations disarmed there could be no wars. Take the gun away from the child and he will never hurt himself. If it were so easy!

Their confidence alarmed the authors of the Conference. They did not mean disarmament, but limitation of armament. Moreover it was not even a Conference *for* but one *on* limitation. This was equivalent to saying that there were other matters involved in cutting down arms—the causes that had brought them into being in the first place, the belief that only in them was security, and that if you were to do away with them you must find a substitute, and a way to make this substitute continually effective. That is, there were several problems for the Conference to solve if they were to put a limit to armaments, and they

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were not easy problems. But those who kept their eyes on disarmament, pure and simple, refused to face them.

Along with the many who believed the coming Conference could say the magic word were not a few—the sophisticated, who from the start said: "Well, of course, you don't expect anything to come out of it." Or, "Are you not rather naive to suppose that they will do anything?" And generally the comment was followed by "Of course nothing came from Paris."

This superior attitude—sometimes vanity, sometimes disillusionment, sometimes resentment at trying any new form of international dealing—was quite useless to combat. You had an endless task of course if you attacked them on the point of nothing coming out of Paris when you believed profoundly that a great deal of good, as well as much evil, had come out of Paris, and that the good is bound to increase and the evil to diminish as time goes on.

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Very singular, the way that people dismiss the treaty of Versailles, drop it out of count as a thing so bungling and evil that it is bound to eventuate only in wars, bound to be soon upset. The poor human beings that made the treaty of Versailles lacked omniscience, to be sure, and they certainly strained their "fourteen points," but it will be noted that not a few of the arrangements that they made are working fairly well.

Moreover, what the Superior forget is that that treaty had an instrument put into it intended for its own correction. The Covenant of the League of Nations is a part of the treaty of Versailles and it says very specifically that if at any time in the future any treaty—if that means anything it must include the treaty of Versailles—becomes "inapplicable," works disturbance between the nations instead of peace, the League may consider it.

The belief in political magic on one side

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and doubt of all new political ventures on the other, made the preliminary days of the Washington Conference hard for the simple-minded observer, prepared to hope for the best and to take no satisfaction in the worst, not to ask more than the conferring powers thought they could safely undertake, to believe that the negotiators would be as honest as we can expect men to be, and that within the serious limits that are always on negotiators, would do their best. One had to ask himself, however, what substantial reasons, if any, he had that the Conference would be able to do the things that it had set down as its business. This business was very concisely laid down in an agenda, divided into two parts and running as follows:

Limitation of Armaments:

(1) Limitation of naval armaments under which shall be discussed the following:

- (A) Basis of limitation.
- (B) Extent
- (C) Fulfillment
- (D) Rules for control of new agencies of warfare

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(E) Limitation of land armaments.

Far Eastern Questions:

(1) Questions relating to China

First. Principles to be applied

Second. Application

Subjects:

(A) Territorial integrity

(B) Administrative integrity

(C) Open door

(D) Concessions, monopolies, preferential privileges

(E) Development of railways, including plans relative to the Chinese Eastern Railway

(F) Preferential railway rates

(G) Status of existing commitments.

Siberia:

Sub-headings the same as those under China.

Mandated Islands:

Sub-headings the same as those under China with railway sections eliminated.

What reasons were there for thinking that the nations—England, France, Italy, China, Japan, Belgium, Holland, Portugal—could, with the United States, handle these problems of the Pacific in such a way that they would be able to cut their armaments, and, cutting them, find a satisfactory substitute. There were several reasons.

A first, and an important one, was that the difficulties to be adjusted were, as de-