

**THE ECONOMIC CAUSES  
OF MODERN WAR; A  
STUDY OF THE PERIOD:  
1878-1918, NUMBER 6**

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The economic causes of modern war; a study of the period: 1878-1918, Number 6 by John  
Bakeless

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**JOHN BAKELESS**

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THE ECONOMIC CAUSES  
OF MODERN WAR

A STUDY OF THE PERIOD: 1878-1918

BY

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TO  
KATHERINE LITTLE BAKELESS





## INTRODUCTION

THE present volume is an effort to trace the chain of economic causes which produce modern wars. It is an effort also to show that the same series of causes, at the same time that they bring about wars, are working (somewhat less effectively) towards increasing international solidarity. And finally, it is a very modest attempt to indicate, tentatively, the general lines on which the operation of these economic causes in the first direction may be limited and in the second forwarded.

Originally it was a study only of the economic causes of war; but as the research progressed it speedily became apparent that there was another side to the picture. By an ironic paradox the same forces were producing two effects: they were working toward war and peace at the same time.

The rise of industrialism has led to a struggle for markets and for food supplies and raw materials. These have led to international friction culminating in war, mainly through questions of colonial policy. But since industrialism and colonial expansion are impossible without a high degree of financial inter-relationship among nations, and since the interest of the financier is usually (but not by any means always) in the preservation of peace for the sake of his investments' safety, the forces that generate wars also generate a force which tends to prevent them. Moreover, the extreme complexity of these inter-relationships between modern industrial states, through the need for international transportation, communication, standardization of weights and measures, publication of tariffs, and the like, has bred a

spirit of co-operation among nations which is opposed to the war spirit.

But it is quite apparent that as matters have stood hitherto, the economic causes are working a good deal faster towards war than peace. The ratio of four peaceful years to thirty-six years of war during the period 1878-1918 scarcely indicates that the war god is going out of business immediately. It is for this reason that I have stressed the causation of war, rather than its prevention; and have tried only in the concluding chapter to indicate very briefly where the most promising remedy lies. For those who are familiar with their writings, my debt to Mr. J. L. Garvin of the London *Observer* and to Mr. H. N. Brailsford will be too obvious to need the acknowledgment that I make most gratefully.

The three quotations prefixed to the text serve to indicate pretty accurately in advance the approach to the subject. There is here no effort to advance a purely "economic theory of history"; there is, however, an attempt to demonstrate that the root of modern war lies in economic conditions, even though other causes are sometimes operative to a less extent. There is also a constant effort to strip off the disguises which purely economic motives are likely to assume.

The study was begun while I was still in military service at Camp Lee, Virginia. The duties of a battalion adjutant having proved scarcely conducive to research, it was laid aside and resumed some months later, after which it was presented in skeletal form before the Seminar in the Philosophy of History at Harvard. As a result of the criticisms received there, several changes were made, and the subsequent revision has led to the introduction of much additional data.

The manuscript has been read by Professor William Ernest Hocking, of Harvard University, by Professor Walter

Wallace McLaren and Dr. James Washington Bell, of Williams College, and by Mr. Lennox Mills, Rhodes Scholar from British Columbia, greatly to its benefit and my own. I owe to the Reverend Father Campbell, of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, first hand information relative to conditions in the Far East; to Dean J. H. Latané, of Johns Hopkins University, and to Professor I. W. Howerth, of the University of California, assistance in locating references; to Dean Le Baron Russell Briggs, of Harvard University, aid in the revision of manuscript; and to Colonel James B. Gowen, Executive Officer, General Staff College, United States Army, the compilation of the list of wars on page 46.

Although I am greatly indebted to these gentlemen for many suggestions of the greatest value, the responsibility both for statements of fact and for conclusions is, of course, entirely my own.

JOHN BAKELESS.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,  
26 October, 1920.