

THE CHOICE BEFORE US

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The choice before us by G. Lowes Dickinson

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G. LOWES DICKINSON

**THE CHOICE
BEFORE US**

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PREFACE

It is so difficult in war-time, for any one who does not deal with immediate exigencies, to gain a fair hearing, that I think it necessary to say in a preface some things which otherwise I might safely have left to the reader's own perception. I am not, in this book, discussing the origin or justification of the present war, nor the participation in it of this country. As a matter of fact, I agree with the general view that, after the invasion of Belgium, it would have been neither right nor wise for us to abstain. But the arguments of this book should be equally cogent to readers who take the most different views on these matters. For, whatever may be thought of the immediate origin of the war, it cannot be dissociated from all the deeper causes which have led to wars in the past and may lead to them in the future; and it is these with which I deal. I argue that war proceeds from wrong ideas and wrong policies; that in these ideas and policies all nations have been implicated; and that this war will have been fought in vain unless it leads to a change of attitude in all governments and all peoples. This change, I agree, is most required in Germany, and may be most difficult to effect there. But there are, in all countries, traditions, interests, prejudices and illusions making for war, and it is these that I endeavour to expose.

In the first part of the book I set forth the system of ideas and facts which I call Militarism. I have given no

definition of that term because it signifies something too complex for definition. But I will so far summarize my meaning as to say that Militarism is at once a state of mind and a military and political system. On the one hand, it is a belief that war is both inevitable and wholesome—the notion that it is wholesome fostering the notion that it is inevitable, and vice versa. On the other hand, it is a system whereby every citizen is compelled to military service, whereby a large and powerful class of military officers influences or dominates policy, and whereby education is directed by the State to a glorification of war. So conceived, it is clear that Militarism is more perfectly developed in Germany than anywhere else. But in other countries, too, it is both partially a fact and potentially a danger. And I argue that nothing but a complete and radical reform in international relations can prevent the danger from becoming a reality.

For Militarism does not arise without cause. Its main cause is the menace of war. And that menace grows continually more terrible as preparation for war, in all States, becomes more effective. Nations do not choose Militarism. It is forced upon them. And if, when this war is over, the conditions that led up to it are to be perpetuated, Militarism is likely not only to be maintained and exasperated on the Continent, but to be introduced into the United Kingdom, the United States, and China. In Japan it already prevails. The fact that men have died by millions to destroy it will have no effect on this result, unless, in all countries, those who have leisure and knowledge deliberately plan and work for a durable peace. It is as a contribution to such work that the second part of this book was written. But the second part is intimately connected with the first, and should not be considered apart from it.

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It will not, I hope, be inferred that, because I condemn war uncompromisingly, I therefore condemn those who take part in it. Nothing can be further from my thought. Too many of my own friends have fought and died, or are yet to die, in this war. I do not praise them, for I have no right to praise what is above praise. I have wished to do better than praise. I have wished to contribute to a future in which such sacrifices as theirs shall never again be required. I have wished to destroy the errors which perpetuate war. And if I have succeeded, in any smallest measure, in that, I shall have helped the young men I have loved and admired to the purpose for which they have fought and died.

I have profited throughout by the sympathy and criticism of my friend Miss F. M. Stawell. I do not claim to associate her, more than she would choose to be associated, with the result. But I know that, whatever be the defects of the book, in matter or manner, they would have been far greater but for her judgment and tact.

POSTSCRIPT

The two greatest events of the war, the Russian revolution and the declaration of war by the United States, occurred after this book was in type. Both enhance, beyond all reckoning, the good prospects of civilization. The party at present in power in Russia appears to be opposed to schemes of imperialistic aggrandizement and inclined to international solutions. And the United States, which have entered the war with no other purpose than to secure the rule of right, will now have an undisputed place at the conference which is to settle the future. The outlook for a new international organization, based upon a new will for creative peace, has never been so bright. All that remains to make a certainty of hope is a change of

government in Germany. That change seems now to be probable, if not during, then immediately after the war. And if, and when, it takes place, there can be no further scruples about including the German people in the League of Nations. The best of all guarantees for the future, the good will of the peoples, seems now to be almost assured. May their leaders know how to elicit and interpret that will in all countries!

April 6, 1917.