

The Progress of Science: Substitutes for War

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THIS war, beyond measure disastrous to civilization, is a trial also of our democracy. We may hope that it is an old-world war and an old-men's war, repugnant to the genius of our newer life. The statements of some of our public men and the contents of some of our newspapers can not be read without discouragement. But it is also true that there has perhaps not appeared a cartoon in any American newspaper tending to glorify war, and no legislation has so far been enacted in preparation for war. There is good reason to believe that the people have not been infected by the contagion of blood.

As Professor Patrick argued in a recent issue of the Monthly, man is by genetic inheritance a fighting and a playing animal, not an animal delighting in steady work. The ape and the tiger will be exterminated elsewhere in nature before they will be suppressed in man. It is a slow process, but surely proceeding.

The writer of this note has determined the proportion of each century in which the leading nations have been engaged in war. The curve thus found has no great reliability; for it does not take into account the percentages of the peoples concerned, but its course clearly indicates that even under circumstances as they have been, wars will come to an end. And there is good reason to believe that the newer condition—universal education and universal suffrage, democratic control, improved economic conditions of living for the people, the scientific attitude—will tend to bend the curve more rapidly toward the base line of permanent "peace on earth and good will to men."

While man has inherited instincts which exhibit themselves in playing and fighting, the same instincts may by social control be diverted to playing the games of art or science, to fighting disease and vice. It is rarely wise or feasible to attempt to suppress instincts; they should be directed so as to provide desirable conduct. Loyalty to family, to group, to neighborhood and to nation can not be lightly cast away for an abstract cosmopolitanism. But it can be expressed otherwise than by seizing everything in sight by cunning or by violence.

William James, the great psychologist, in one of his brilliant essays published in The Popular Science Monthly for October, 1910, tells us that history is a bath of blood; we inherit the war-like type; our ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow; showing the irrationality and horror of war does not prevent it; but a moral equivalent can be found by enlisting an army to toil and suffer pain in doing the hard and routine work of the world. It is doubtful, however, if the "gilded youths" to whom James refers would accept "dish-washing, clothes-washing and window-washing, road-building and tunnel-making, foundries and stoke-holes," as a substitute for war, and for the great mass of the people there is more than enough of these things. It is to escape from them that we seek excitement and adventure, intoxication by drugs and war.

Professor Cannon, of Harvard University, proposes international football and other athletic contests as substitutes for war. The adrenal glands, whose secretions excite the combative and martial emotions, must function, and their activity, he argues, can be directed in this way. Mr. Bryan has just now made the proposal that we build six great national roads by which armies might be collected for defence; the secretary of the navy has founded a Naval Inventions Board; the postmaster general has suggested that aeroplanes be used to deliver mail in order that we may have an aerial corps ready for service. There may be an element of the absurd in some of these proposals, as there would be in using submarines to catch cod fish, so that there might be practise in building and managing such crafts for peaceful pursuits. There is, however, psychological justification for aiming to direct the emotions so that their discharge is not destructive, but of benefit to the nation and to the world. Such would be the development of our national resources, the construction of railways, roads, waterworks and the like; social and political reforms; progress in the care of public health, in education and in scientific research. It is proposed that the next congress should spend half a billion dollars on the army and navy. It is possible that on a plebiscite vote, exactly under existing conditions, a majority would vote to make the department of war a department of public

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works, military defence being only one of its functions, and to spend the sum proposed on public works useful in case of war, but not an incitement to war.