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Concerning atrocities.

Warbasse, James Peter

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CONCERNING ATROCITIES

By
JAMES PETER WARBASSE

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JAMES P. WARBASSE.
PENZANCE POINT.
WOODS HOLE, MASS.

CONCERNING ATROCITIES

BY JAMES PETER WARBASSE

THE air is surcharged with atrocities. Incriminations and recriminations are hurled hither and thither by press, post, wire, and wireless. The Germans have been atrocious in Belgium; the Russians in East Prussia; the Austrians, in Servia; and the English—nowhere, because they have not been able to invade the enemies' country, but in their own country they got themselves into practice upon their own innocent girlhood before they set sail for virgin foreign fields. Atrocities are the order of the day. The crowning atrocity to date seems to be the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

As one views this holocaust of fire, rapine, plunder, debauchery, and murder, one must be impressed with the observation that the atrocities themselves are less dreadful than their common causes. The distressing fact is that the causes of all of these atrocities existed before the Great War, and perpetrated quite as great atrocities; and, what is still more distressing, they will continue to provoke atrocities after the war is over. The world is making the grievous error of isolating the acts of this war from the rest of social conduct as though it were something unusual, unexpected, cataclysmic, unique. We hear the expressions that this war is "the failure of civilization," or "the breakdown of Christianity," or "the debauchery of governments." How foolish are these expressions. How can that fail which has not succeeded? How can that break down which has not been built up? How can that become debauched which already is debauched and debauching?

There is no new principle nor unique manifestation in the Great War. The atrocities which the Germans have committed in Belgium are no greater than those unspeakable atrocities which the Belgians committed in the Congo. The atrocities which the Germans have committed against the English are incomparably trivial beside the brutalities which the English committed in the Sudan. As to the bestialities of the Russians in Eastern Prussia, Russia out-does them every day in times of peace against her own helpless people. The destruction by Germany of a hundred odd American citizens who were packed around a cargo of ammunition, is less atrocious than the atrocities which the United States perpetrates upon its own peaceful Indians.

The history of every one of these nations is a series of broken treaties and atrocities committed under the protection or by the instigation of government. Not one of these nations, which prates so glibly of the sins of the others, is taking a step to abandon its own atrociousness. They are all committing greater atrocities at home than abroad. The United States officially and by executive fiat went upon its knees with a heart full of hypocrisy, prayed for peace; and then rose from its knees and proceeded with the production of shot and shell, to be employed in killing men, women, and children—all manufactured and exported with the knowledge, co-operation and approval of that same Government which had ordered the prayers for peace. Now that same hypocrisy, which stood calmly by while men, women, and children in Colorado were murdered in the interest of a privileged property-owning class, threatens to sacrifice thousands more of American lives in a world war, as though that might atone for those already lost!

This war is something more than a ruling-class enterprise. It is an expression of the governments which are

maintained in the interest of the privileged property-owning class, and which in their brutal zeal for the interests of their pet class have fallen at one another's throats. Let us not make the mistake of holding German, English, French, Russian, or American human beings guilty. The people in all of these countries are better at heart than they act. The atrocities are more the atrocities of governments than of men and women. It has been government that has instigated and kept alive the militarism that has poisoned the minds of school children and now puts guns in their hands and sends them forth to commit atrocities.

Shooting men is not less of an atrocity than raping women, burning girls in Triangle fires, or drowning people at sea because of the inhuman quest for profits of a transatlantic transportation company. When the truth becomes known it will be discovered that the people who perished with the Lusitania could have been saved but for the ruthless disregard of means for saving lives which would have cost the company some small fraction of its profits.

Deprived of his liberty, coerced into becoming a wheel in a machine, which moves or stops at the word of command from the government above, the soldier and his doings are but the expressions of the State. In Belgium, it appears that the attacks upon non-combatants were instigated from above; they were manifestations of government. The free German, had he not been deprived of his liberties by the state, would prefer to remain at home, till his fields by day, and play with his children after supper.

There is one great atrocity in this wretched business of which we should not lose sight; that is the State. The State exists because there are privileged people, whose privileges would pass from them were they not protected

by the powerful machinery of government. A privileged class means a class which enjoys advantages which others do not have; and there can be no class having advantages unless there is another class suffering disadvantages. The several governments, top-heavy with militarism, which they had built up for the protection of their privileged people, have toppled over into the vortex.

This is the historic fate of governments. It threatens to be the fate of the United States. When it becomes the interest of the privileged economic forces of the United States to have war with Mexico, we shall have it. At present our property-privileged class desires the exploitation of the markets of South America, and the natural and human resources of that virgin country. Hence the Monroe doctrine. But the Monroe doctrine is political buncombe, unless backed by a powerful navy. Still in the face of it our Government holds out to the world the hypocrisy that we are a non-belligerent nation. The day approaches when militarism will drag us into war, because the privileged interests require the State and the Monroe doctrine, and militarism is their natural offspring.

Hope lies in the abolition of the twin interests, privilege and the State, and supplanting them with a free society in which human brotherhood and mutual aid shall become the dominant forces.

