

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIFTH EDITION

Francis Neilson's *How Diplomats Make War* is one of the classic books of World War literature. Published anonymously a quarter of a century ago, in 1915, it still holds its place as a standard work. Innumerable later writers have plowed deep in the soil first broken by this volume. Whole libraries have been reared on the foundation structure of its original and creative thought. But *How Diplomats Make War* stands memorable for its courage, vision, rigorous scholarship, and proud proclamation, in an age of fear and falsehood, of the truth.

I

Mr. Neilson's masterpiece is remarkable, first of all, as a pioneer work in that field of inquiry which has to do with the causes of the World War. By the early dawn of 1915, in all the Allied countries, and in America, the Satanic theory of the War was firmly established in the minds not only of the common people, but also of statesmen, scholars, and public-leaders. This theory was in essence the doctrine that the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Chancellor Von Bethmann-Hollweg, and Admiral Von Tirpitz was exclusively responsible for the vast catastrophe of arms. The Triple Entente and allied nations, desirous of nothing but peace, had been bulldozed, threatened, brow-beaten, and at last openly attacked, by a power which had long conspired against the settled order of mankind, and long prepared for its con-

INTRODUCTION

quest and subjection! Germany was a guilty power which had assailed the innocence of the great democracies (strangely including Tsarist Russia)! The Kaiser was Satan making war against God and His angels in the heaven of modern civilization! This idea was of course a part of the propaganda necessary for the proper conduct of the great conflict. It was in part an honest deception induced on the one hand by the propaganda itself and on the other hand by the rationalization incident to any life-and-death struggle. At bottom it was an expression of the ancient human habit of thinking ourselves to be right and of course our enemies, and even friends, to be wrong in altercation between us. In any case it was a settled impression, as firmly inbedded in men's minds as cement in a foundation-wall.

Francis Neilson was the first man to break with this impression in a work of sound scholarship and popular appeal. There were others who saw the ridiculousness of the Satanic theory—G. Lowes Dickinson was one, and E. D. Morel was another. But *How Diplomats Make War* was a work at once so solid in fact and so fertile in suggestion, that it became the root from which sprang that vast growth of literature which has at last established in the annals of mankind the unassailable truth that all the warring nations of 1914 had responsibility for the War, with Germany by no means the most culpable of the lot. What Mr. Neilson did was to produce for the first time a comprehensive reading of the historical events preceding and producing the World War, which straightway became, and has since remained, the standard interpretation of the period, as witness such later works as those of Barnes, Fay, Gooch, and many others. He showed, on the basis of indubitable fact, (1) that all the imperialistic nations of Europe, the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance alike, had played the diplomatic game of

INTRODUCTION

power to their own advantage, and to the final result of war, and (2) that this game of the diplomats was played in defiance of the real wishes of the people of all lands, and thus in betrayal of their interests. Nothing was more important, in Mr. Neilson's analysis of the situation, than his shocking revelation of the gulf which lies, even in the most democratic states, between the purposes of the people and the policies of their governments.

II

But Francis Neilson's work is remarkable not only for its understanding of the past, but also for its forecast of the future. Just as he saw that the tragic phenomenon of the War sprang not from the conspiratorial wickedness of the "Potsdam gang," but from the operation of economic and political forces of empire woven like so many threads into the devious pattern of diplomacy, so he saw that similar forces were at work in the War itself which made impossible any righteous or happy outcome of the struggle. Because he knew his history, Mr. Neilson was never fooled by any of the conventional notions, later transformed into veritable articles of faith, which had to do with "a war to end war," "a war to make the world safe for democracy," "a war to protect and preserve civilization." He knew perfectly well that the same men were in control of the War itself as had been in control of the policies preceding the War, that these men represented interests essentially selfish and violent and thus hostile to international order and to the general welfare of the world, and that these interests themselves embodied forces certain to lead the nations, after the war, straight back into the old paths of rivalry, enmity, military preparedness, and war again. The very fact of war, the fine flower of imperialistic diplomacy, doomed the ideals which sincere but

INTRODUCTION

sadly befooled men had introduced into the War, and for which millions of innocents were being slaughtered.

How Diplomats Make War was therefore as extraordinary for its anticipation of the future as for its interpretation of the past. As an example of accurate prophecy, a quarter of a century before the event, what can match the following passage from the concluding chapter (page 370), written at a time when it was rapturously believed that victory in the war would consummate the dream of a disarmed and peaceful world:

"After the war it is quite probable there will be greater Governmental reasons for building up massive armaments than ever before. One has only to think of the position in Central Europe if Germany be utterly crushed. Will she be satisfied to let Russia become the greatest power in Europe? . . . What military and naval strength will Britain require to insist on nearly 80,000,000 of the Teutonic race in Europe remaining quiet? If in a comparatively few years France could rise again out of the dust of 1870, to be a Power great enough to seek alliances with Britain and Russia, surely any one with a grain of sense must realize what Germany will do in a far shorter space of time. It is not meet that statesmen should be expected to perform miracles of that nature. Let us then have done with the silly notion that a crushing defeat of Germany will mean disarmament."

Not many had the "grain of sense" to see what Mr. Neilson saw in 1915—that war would lead not to disarmament and peace, but only to greater armaments and more terrible war. Nor is that "grain of sense" in many minds today! For at this very moment when Mr. Neilson's prophecy is now fulfilled to the letter, there is waxing clamor for another war to crush Germany, disarm the world, and end war! The nursery-rhyme hero who jumped into a bramble-bush a second time to scratch in his eyes which had been scratched out in his first jump into the bush, was a paragon of wisdom as compared to the men who would today plunge into a second World War to regain what we lost, or never found, in the first World War.

INTRODUCTION

III

Apart from the history and prophecy contained in its pages, Mr. Neilson's book has as its central feature the discussion of the armament problem. If the data of reason could dispel from men's minds the myth of preparedness, *How Diplomats Make War* would long ago have accomplished this deliverance. Chapters VI and VII tell the whole story—the profit-motive behind the armament industry, the panic-mongering which sustains and extends the business, the failure of “adequate national defense” to save nations from disaster, the surety with which this “defense” sweeps the nations into the very wars which through armaments they have sought to prevent—and the concluding chapter sums up the truth with a cogency of application to the problems of our western civilization which is unanswerable. “Armaments create wars, and militarism is at all times inimical to the real interests of the people” (page 375). But the myth persists. It clings to men's minds as a superstition which demoralizes reason, poisons passion, and nurtures the very fears which it would suppress. Having wrought the havoc of the last war, one might think that this superstition would at last be exorcised from the human consciousness, and mankind thus delivered.

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES