SUBSOIL OF PEACE

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by

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IT IS one of the good fortunes of mankind that actualities do not accord with descriptions. For men are prone to extravagant expressions which, if they represented reality, would defeat all our hopes and dreams. Characteristic of this tendency to overstatement is a current phrase worn smooth in the stream of conversation and official utterance. "Total war" has been used so often and so widely that it is taken for granted and becomes a barrier rather than a guide to understanding the struggle. In some connotations and with proper technical reservations the expression is useful. It indicates the profoundly dislocating effect of war. In a world as delicately intermeshed as ours, social and economic dislocations spread in ever widening circles.

In several respects, however, the phrase tends to confuse rather than clarify our ideas. In the first place, this cliché carries an underlying assumption that total war is a new phenomenon in human history. Earlier experience is made to seem invalid, and the concept of a fundamental historical discontinuity is promoted. The assumption and the inferences it stimulates are incorrect and misleading. It is true that mechanized warfare requires the labor of many more workmen for every combat soldier than in earlier times. But the difference is relative. It is true, also, that modern care of casualties necessitates an elaboration of organization which did not previously exist. But the engrossment of the energies of a large section of the populace for the civilian support of the fighting man is no new thing under the sun.

In the days of the French Revolution, for example, there was a "people's army," and everyone was expected to perform some function. The decree, read in the Convention on August 23, 1793, ran as follows:

All citizens must discharge their debt to liberty. Some will give their labor, others their wealth, some their counsel, others their strength; all will give it the blood that flows in their veins. Thus all Frenchmen, all sexes, all ages are called... to defend liberty.

From this moment until.... the enemies shall have been driven from the territory of the Republic, all citizens of France are in permanent requisition
for the service of the armies. The young men will go forth to battle; the married men will make arms and transport food; the women will make tents, uniforms, and will serve in the hospitals; the children will prepare lint from old linen; the old men will gather in the public places to rouse the courage of the warriors, to excite hatred of kings and preach the unity of the Republic. National houses will be converted into barracks, public squares into factories of arms, and the earth of cellars will be examined to extract the saltpetre from it. Saddle horses will be requisitioned to complete the corps of cavalry; draught horses, other than those employed in agriculture, will be used for artillery and transport. The Committee of Public Safety is....authorized to set up all the buildings, factories and workshops which shall be considered necessary for the execution of this work, and to requisition for that object, in the whole extent of the Republic, the craftsmen and workers who can contribute to success.

That indicates a degree of totality seldom attained even in modern war.

We can get collateral evidence of the totality of earlier wars from the altered status of women. Women do not customarily fight at the front, but it is significant that following one war after another, their field of activity has been enlarged through the successful exercise of so many additional functions during the emergency. If the wars of the past were merely those of kings and professional armies, as is frequently asserted, the status of women would not have been so profoundly affected.

Whenever, in the past, any war was desperate and long continued, like the Thirty Years' War or the Napoleonic wars, the casualties, the destruction, the economic and social dislocation, and the impairment of health were so tremendous, relative to the means of recuperation, that they might well be said to have involved a disaster as "total" as the present war. The mask of newness is false.

"Total war" is misleading in another of its inferences. The phrase implies that the whole world is involved because of a newly developed interdependence. Again the change is relative rather than fundamental, for the world has long been more interdependent than we are prone to realize. Spices are to us a luxury or a condiment, whereas once they were essential as a substitute for refrigeration. For that reason they exercised a very powerful drive during the period of exploration and conquest. We may remind ourselves that Columbus was searching for the Indies, that the thrust toward the ocean was
occasioned by the cutting of ancient caravan routes in the Middle East. The discovery of America was an incident to a profound dislocation of a vital interdependence. That is a familiar and dramatic instance, but we should remember that it is far from unique; interdependence is old, and the more history is studied the older and more powerful its influences are seen to be.

In yet another manner the phrase "total war" is misleading. It is so magnificently inclusive as to give the impression that all aspects of life are dominated by the war. That is an underestimation of mankind. Human nature has both a profundity and a resiliency which that assumption disregards. The mind of man is so various, so rich, and so powerful that it simultaneously takes into account a wide variety of activities, and, except for moments of overwhelming drama, it participates in many parallel and simultaneous activities which may be lost to sight while subconsciously pursued.

The power of recovery, moreover, is so great that the waters of life can close over a long history of tragedy and display soon afterward an unbroken calm. One has but to read the poetry and memoirs of soldiers or become familiar with their humor to see that even in the midst of the shattering sensations of battle itself there is an intellectual and moral and social life upon a wholly different emotional plane, contrasting with and complementing the dreadful experiences of carnage. Indeed, sanity depends upon ability to hold onto the elements of normal life. "Total war," however, tends to conceal the substantial reality that the economic and social and moral tragedy through which we are now passing is not absolute; it tends also to intimate that there is complete absorption in strife.

Yet the realities are quite different from those inferences. With all its brutalities and terrors, there are vital forces not only within individual human lives but also within national and even international life, which war does not wholly dominate.

If the phrase "total war" were to be taken in its full and literal sense, then the concept of peace would cease to exist. Yet it is the essence of war as a political instrument that it is a brief and violent means to ends quite different. There must be room outside its false totality, therefore, not only for some other idea but, indeed, for the major idea. Otherwise, we are forced to adopt the Nazi concept of war as the normal state and peace as only an abnormal interlude.
At a time when it seems as though all the ties which bind men in unity have dissolved, when so much emphasis is put upon the forces that divide us, and when nation is pitted against nation as though for its complete destruction, it is worth recalling to our minds that there is a subsoil of peace. Just as below the surface of the earth there are streams of water, rivers and lakes, minerals and metals, jewels and many other riches, which exist no matter how sterile a "scorched-earth" policy may render the fertile surface, so even beneath total war there is a subsoil of peace. Its riches will still be available when men return from political and economic and social madness to reason and sanity.

Cultural life, by definition, must be catholic. It cannot be circumscribed by a narrow nationalism; its objectives cannot be limited to striking power; it cannot be foreshortened to make a heavy impact upon an immediate crisis. It has dimensions not only in time and space but also in feeling, which absorb the shocks of temporary, however violent, calamities. Cultural life, in short, supplies a fundamental continuity in the grand strategy of mankind’s history. It is deep enough and vivid enough and vital enough to transcend and overcome tragic discontinuities.

Within a vast cultural framework, which includes all mankind, there are languages far more widely available than any lingua franca and more a bond of unity than Latin was for medieval scholars. The language of beauty, which finds expression in the arts, is as readily accessible to foe as to friend. It requires no translation, it demands no interpreter, it represents something so fundamental and so universal that it defies censorship. Even though men are forbidden to hear the music, even though the picture may not be reproduced, no censor controls the memory, and no dictator can suborn the imagination.

Part of the great tradition is a common treasury of literature. Its appeal is so universal in space and so timeless in chronology, so deeply imbedded in the emotions, that it remains a valid human reserve against any current event, however overwhelming. The Bible has been translated, in whole or in part, into more than four hundred and fifty languages and dialects. It contains a historical record of the search for a spiritual interpretation of the universe — for a first cause among transient causes, for an explanation of the meaning of life which is neither ephemeral nor distracted. In the record there set down are all the stigmata of total war: annihilation, pestilence,
bestiality, overwhelming grief, courage, faith, the triumph of the wrong and the victory of the right; but through all the mad pattern of circumstance is an emerging insight into the mind of God. The partial nature of the attainment of the insights intimated there does not alter their availability. The record is clear that, after the moral order seems to have been abandoned, it exhibits powers of recovery far beyond the anticipations of mere statistical prediction.

All great literature shares with the Bible this continuing validity which total war may for a moment obscure, but which remains as a genuine subsoil of peace. So catholic is the treasury of letters that the libraries of the world are not dominated by nationalism. They gather in the literary riches of mankind and make them available in war as in peace. The interchange of ideas and the mutual sharing of treasures of the mind represent so profound a response to human needs that they defy the pretended totality of war.

There is, therefore, an intellectual comradeship which binds together men of every nation. The great fellowship of the universities is the product of eight hundred years of experience. All stem from common origins; great as their differences are, all have the same fundamental organization; the historic continuity remains unbroken; their tradition defies war. The universities are not merely repositories, not merely saviors of what has been precious; they are dynamic forces dedicated to the expansion of knowledge and the enrichment of understanding. The search for truth is so deeply ingrained in their essential being that it cannot be wholly extirpated, even amid the fury of battle.

On the surface the air is strident with propaganda, with its deceptive clarity and its calculated obscurity. If the truth appears at all, it is partial and designed to produce an effect; the objective is to rouse emotion and lull the yearning for freedom from its active state into passive acquiescence to official ideas. But far beneath the surface there is a different intellectual climate where the search for truth goes on, truth for its own sake. Studies of pure science proceed with no ulterior motive; philosophy pursues its insights by rigorous logic toward clearer statements of fundamental relationships.

The publication of learned periodicals continues even during war, and great efforts are being made to send them, if necessary by devious routes, so that they may be exchanged among belligerents. When that is impossible, reserves are built up, so that at the end of the war files
may be completed, gaps closed, and the essential intellectual continuity restored.

The Institute for Intellectual Co-operation is merely the formal reflection of the international character of the search for truth. It is by no means the only agency of intellectual fellowship, but it remains a dramatic and tangible symbol of the dynamic quality of that cooperation.

These and hundreds of other activities represent neither self-interest nor group interest nor national interest. They are dedicated to the ideal epitomized by Goethe, but held by men everywhere whose greatness cannot be confined: "Above all nations is humanity." These things are valid for the whole world and are freely given to it. Not everyone will attain to such insights, but there must be the grain of mustard seed, there must be the leaven in the lump. They are supplied by men who seek knowledge and mature it into wisdom, who pursue truth, not only with single-minded devotion, but with flaming zeal.

This universal quality is reflected in the very structure of the university. Its personnel constitutes a miniature international society, composed of men from many lands. American universities have profited, in this respect, by the bigotry of the totalitarians. They have become a refuge for displaced savants, so that today many who are technically "enemy aliens" continue their studies and their teaching here in America as in England, even in the midst of war. In addition, many native professors have enriched their knowledge and their understanding by travel and study abroad. As the medieval university was characterized by the wandering student, so the modern university is characterized by the internationally trained and experienced professor.

Even more profound than the intellectual aspects of the universal tradition of culture are its moral foundations. Just as intellectual unity is exemplified in libraries and in universities, so also religion and the church which gives it mundane expression are the common possessions of mankind. War leads men to attempt to use the church for belligerent purposes; but, however much that institution is prostituted and the precepts of religion defied or misapplied, there remains beneath the surface of total war a sense of human fellowship deeper and more abiding than the strife.
This powerful underlying moral impulse finds expression in humanitarian activities. The oath of Hippocrates binds the physician to adopt a regimen for the benefit of his patients and not for their hurt; it has been the watchword of healing for ages. In the grand balance of life it must not be forgotten that healing has outrun hurt. The phrase "total war," with its implication of total destruction, should not conceal from us the deep reality of total humanity. As the arts of destruction are speeded in behalf of war, so also are the arts of healing. One has only to hear the story of the handling of casualties at Coventry to realize that in the race between damage and recovery the victory is not to the swift bomb alone, but to the blood bank, the sulfa drugs, and the thousand and one advances in the art of healing which remain after the last bomb has fallen.

It should be remembered that there is a subsoil of peace in the international exchange which makes such benefits possible. During war there is some tendency to keep new aspects of the medical arts secret, but there is a larger tendency to let them flow across the lines of battle. The wounded prisoner is usually given the same medical and surgical advantages as the soldiers of the native land. Once he is no longer effective as a fighting man, his common humanity transcends his enemy status; the profound moral impulse to save human life replaces the political necessity of destroying it. So also the Red Cross carries its ministry of healing, of information and identification, of amelioration and affection right through the barrage. In the midst of brutality which passes comprehension, there is tenderness which surmounts and surpasses it.

The international aspects of humanitarian interest run far beyond our customary awareness. The United States has participated in literally hundreds of conferences and commissions dealing with such subjects as sanitation, habit-forming narcotics, occupational diseases, safety of life at sea, and many other broadly humanitarian topics. Such meetings have a special quality in that they bring not only the governments of different nations but the citizens of different countries into common thought and action on subjects of great social significance. They encourage realization of the solidarity of world-interest because of the interpenetration of social problems.

In addition to cultural, intellectual, moral, and humanitarian interests there is an enormous range of technical subjects, which have
been and still are a bond among nations. In this connection it must be remembered that the League of Nations continues to exist. Americans are likely to write the League off as a failure because it did not achieve political miracles. But in nonpolitical fields it has many distinguished accomplishments. Secretary of State Hull declared on February 2, 1939, "The League... has been responsible for the development of mutual exchange and discussion of ideas and methods to a greater extent and in more fields of humanitarian and scientific endeavor than any other organization in history."

The fact that the Economic, Financial, and Transit Department is now located in America and carrying forward its work is of first importance. Looking forward to the coming peace, it is well to remember that there exists a body which has been functioning for twenty years with a permanent staff, with comparable statistics drawn from many nations, and with a series of recommendations regarding free and unrestricted trade of great technical competence, as well as large international implications. Its studies have not been built from the narrow point of view of a single nation but represent an integrated world-economy.

The health services of the League have also survived the war. The Epidemiological intelligence report, which summarizes the world-picture of the prevalence of disease, is still published each week. Even during the war, the League work in nutrition has had startling results. The effort to control the use of drugs through the Permanent Central Opium Board and the Drug Supervisory Body of the League is well established. The effect on the regulation of legitimate international trade and on the reduction of drug addiction and illicit traffic has been encouraging.

Not only was a great deal of technical work centered in the League of Nations, but it also provided a flexible and effective mechanism for the conduct of technical conferences and for continuing attention to their recommendations. The League built up a vast network of expert committees covering not only well-known areas of international affairs but many of important, however limited, appeal. For example, the Committee for Statistical Experts developed standard forms which make the statistics of the several nations both more readily available and more readily comparable.
Furthermore, there is an enormous range of international organizations based upon treaties and conventions defining specific areas of activity, staffed with professional persons, and operating as permanent agencies. These organizations gather essential data, serve as centers for the dissemination of information, or actually undertake the administration of matters of international interest within their limited and usually technical fields.

Even though international exchange broke down, the existence of a Bank for International Settlements dedicated to the effort to facilitate international clearances is important. The maintenance of its structure in spite of the present war lays a groundwork which can be exploited when peace comes. This and all the other technical instruments which have come to maturity and have a solid basis of experience and philosophy are subsoil resources.

The International Labour Organisation has supplied the foundation for cooperation both among governments and among private citizens to the end that exploitation may give way to better standards, which not only ameliorate the lot of those who have been exploited but which relieve the countries with high standards of an unfair and destructive competition. It has demonstrated that the improvement of conditions in one area is of benefit to all. This basic assumption, now buttressed by a sound body of evidence, must lie at the center of post-war economic reconstruction.

We are accustomed to say that modern technology has made us neighbors, although it is not true. It has increased our contacts, but a neighbor is far more than one whom we see every day and with whom we rub elbows in the hurried traffic of modern life. A neighbor is one with whom there is a feeling of harmony and a sense of fellowship. Neighborliness rests upon moral and emotional assumptions far more than upon mechanical developments; it grows out of common religious, cultural, and intellectual possessions which supply a bond of understanding and sympathy. Common technology only makes them more effective.

Wars are won by the nation with the greatest reserves most wisely utilized — reserves of man-power, reserves of mechanical power, reserves of industrial power, reserves of raw materials, and reserves of morale. On the surface, morale appears to be fortitude in the face of adversity, enthusiasm over victory. It consists in the long pull,
however, of deep spiritual and cultural stability, of profound faith and perspective. When the war is over, these are the reserves which remain of most vital importance. And it is in exploiting them that the solid foundations of peace can be laid. Underneath, the real basis for morale must ever be a fundamental awareness of the ultimate issues of life by which the day-to-day events, in themselves and in short perspective the very pattern of madness and race suicide, may be made credible, not to say meaningful.

Lincoln reminded us that there are always sincere people on both sides: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other." Beneath these prayers for one another's hurt there is a profounder and more permanent sense of universality—"With malice toward none, with charity for all." It is rare in history to find a fighting leader who exemplifies this subsoil of peace, but it is always present in a nation, even when it is not expressed with official sanction or with such classic clarity.

The mechanisms of peace are no better than the spirit which animates them. If one had the best engine in the world without the competence to operate it, no tasks would be performed; with the best engine and perfect competence, but without the will to employ them, both the mechanism and the competence would be wasted. As one looks over a world at war, he must ask himself where the spirit to operate the mechanisms of peace is to be found. Where else except in those elements now so deeply buried, but which, nonetheless, exist and represent the only temper, the only mood, the only will that can make the peace viable?