

## **The effects of war on a nation / James Peter Warbasse.**

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## THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON A NATION.

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The cause of war is to be found in three great social sins—race prejudice, patriotism, and commercial greed for the profits of trade. Race prejudice is based on an inhumane ignorance of our fellow men. Patriotism is fealty to the ruling political machinery of one's country, the function of which is to protect a privileged, property-owning class, and to prevent an exploited working class from securing social justice. Between the two is the enlarged egotism which claims that our social duties are limited to family and country. The quest for the profits of trade in ever-widening markets is a necessary outcome of the economic system prevalent in all of the great war-like countries, because the wages paid to the producing class are not enough to permit them to buy back the products which they create; much of their product must, therefore, go to foreign markets if profits are to be produced for those who do not work.

These are the causes of war; and the effects of war are to approve, confirm, and strengthen these three social sins.

As race prejudice, patriotism, and the competitive struggle for profits brutalize a nation, so does war brutalize a nation. The purposeful killing and maiming of one's fellow men has only a degrading effect. The statement, oft made, that war engenders the nobler qualities of self-sacrifice and bravery is false and at variance with the fundamental principles of human virtue.

The soldier is apt to be a coward, who lacks the bravery and moral courage to stand up for his own liberty and a higher principle, and who falls a weak victim to a mob impulse. He takes in his hand his instrument of death and goes forth to kill fathers, sons, and husbands, hoping to come off himself alive. This is not a noble impulse. He resigns himself to be led like a

sheep; and it is most fitting that he should be clothed in the skin of that docile creature. He loses the feelings of the man in the soldier.

The miserable business has to be settled by treaty and agreement at last, after the killing has been done, and the belligerent countries are loaded up with widows, orphans, and heroes. All of these guarantee a generation of race prejudice against the country which fought them, a generation of patriotic "rallying round the old flag" of the government to which they happen to be subject, and a generation of reactionary consent to the big business which is protected by their flag. Added to this is the keeping alive of the military spirit. G. A. R.'s, Veteran Corps, and pensioners write, talk, sing, parade, and flaunt their bloody business in the faces of people who should be praying for peace and peacefulness. Not satisfied with this, it must be carried into the next generation by the Sons of Veterans and pensioners. When they have passed away, then it is that the sons of the revolution may come upon the field; but few there are who would be willing to be fathers of a revolution—that is never a fashionable thing. Revolutions that succeed in overthrowing a government produce great patriots; revolutions which fail are called insurrections or riots, and the revolutionists are hanged, languish in jail, or go down to history as "traitors to our beloved country." It depends upon who has the strongest artillery, whether one's ancestors are patriots or traitors.

Another effect of war is falsified history which lasts for at least a hundred years. We are only just beginning to have written with truth the history of our American Revolution. The petty business at the bottom of the Revolution, the old falsehoods assigning high-minded motives to the sordid makers of our constitution, the fiction of Washington praying at Valley Forge, the smuggling enterprise in our much misrepresented "Boston Tea Party" are just coming to light; but the old falsehoods still prevail in the books our children have to study. Our war with Mexico was so disgraceful an affair that no historian has dared put the truth

about it in an American school book. He would have as much chance of having his book accepted in the United States as he would if it frankly told the story of the Government playing the part of freebooters or a "second story gang." The history of our Civil War is now hopelessly involved in a muddle of falsehood, jingoism, and sectional and race antagonisms. There are two histories, quite different, one of the North, the other of the South—neither of them true, for the fundamental factors in the Civil War have not yet been put in the accepted school books. War falsifies history, and puts dishonesty into the minds of children.

War defiles the landscape with the statues of soldiers whose only claim to be cast in bronze was that they slew. Everywhere they stand, or bestride mighty stallions. Their eyes look fierce and staring; they never seem to be represented as kind or gentle men. There they are forever foisted upon us. We forget their names and their deeds. In winter they stand capped with the cold, unfriendly snow, in summer peaceful birds of the air bestow their salutations upon them—still they stand staring as though looking for more to slay. And that is what they are doing. They are beckoning growing generations on to the "glories of war." These figures proclaim to the young, "Behold! it was war that put us upon these imperishable pedestals!" and the child's heart naturally answers, "War must be a glorious thing."

The Navy League, The Gun Trust, The Army, The Navy, The Powder Trust, The Police, The Cossacks, The Private Deputy Sheriffs, Gunmen, Church Companies, The National Guard, and The Boy Scouts all have to thank these silent recruiting agents for their services. They help to keep alive the warring, killing spirit. They are the seal of public approval of murder.

Men who go to war, who destroy, kill, rape, pillage, burn, rob, and plunder, do not return to society with sweeter minds or more chastened spirits because of their experiences. Practising injustice upon strangers does not breed a spirit of justice toward our friends.

William Ellery Channing said: "Nations, exasper-

ated by mutual injuries, burn for each other's humiliation and ruin. They delight to hear that famine, pestilence, want, defeat, are desolating a hostile community."

"The slaughter of thousands of fellow beings, instead of awakening pity, flushes them with delirious joy, illuminates the city, and dissolves the whole country in revelry and riot."

"Thus the heart of man is hardened. His worst passions are nourished. He renounces the bonds and sympathies of humanity."

War, like any other degrading movement, helps to fasten upon the people the prevalent religious superstitions. The church is always strengthened by war. Priests and holy icons flourish and are appealed to as never before. War is the heyday of the church. It gets close to the state and the flag, and flaunts its preposterous claims that it can bring to bear upon the situation the influence of higher powers which are beyond the reach of artillery.

The good that comes to a people as a result of war is disillusionment. This is the best hope. Eyes may be opened to the immoralities of race prejudice, patriotism, and commercial exploitation. The crimes which the state commits against society may be better understood when the state throws off the mask and reveals itself a cruel monster. Political diplomacy, militarism, and autocracy are shams; they are revealed by war to be the enemies of society. Out of the disillusionment may come readjustments toward democracy which may be of social service. But the good that comes from war is pitifully inadequate to compensate for the ill that war engenders.

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