

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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SOLDIER OR CITIZEN?

"A straw shows the way the wind blows," and several straws lately have shown us a strong gale blowing in the direction of a Military Despotism. If the Minister of Defence has his way we are to cease to be a free democracy, our youth educated and trained as citizens of the freest country the sun ever shone on, and we are to become one vast camp, our boys taken from the care of scholarly teachers who are training them to be scientists, inventors, thinkers, quick to act on their own initiative, and are to be handed over to the drill-sergeant to be made parts of one vast machine, to obey blindly their military autocrat, and "never to think of thinking for themselves at all."

We stand at the parting of the ways. It may seem a small thing three months in camp, but "we see dimly in the present what is small and what is great." It is the first step on the road leading to militarism. We were told that we went to war to crush Prussian Militarism. If this scheme is carried into effect, then morally the victory rests with Germany. We have not conquered Prussianism, but it has conquered, and is dominating us. This scheme would seriously interfere with the boy's education, and preparation for his life work, and this is of the highest importance. Our education system is stinted to provide for Defence already, and now they want to place youths for three months, not under Educational Authorities, but under Defence Autocrats. The most serious handicap to the British Army was the poor physical condition of the people, due to improper feeding, housing, to the use of intoxicants, and to diseases caused by overcrowding.

Our Dominion's best defence is a free and fit manhood and womanhood. Increase education grants—don't starve our schools; let doctors and dentists attend the children and remedy physical defects. Give physical culture and every condition necessary for health, but in the name of common-sense do not take our boys during their most impressionable period and herd them in camps and drill them into automata. Then, again, grave moral dangers always attend the herding of young men in camps without the restraining home influence. We do not wish to enlarge upon this aspect, but scenes took place at camp which are unprintable, and we are not going to hand our young sons over to this at the bidding of any military autocrat.

Then what about the conscientious objector? No nation can afford to disregard the supremacy of conscience. It is true that while we were at war scenes like those which took place at the Wanganui Barracks passed with only a protest. Whether true or false, yet thousands of our women believed that we had only a choice of evils, that it was either military despotism at home or the military despotism of the Hun. Believing thus out of two evils they chose the lesser. But we are not at war now, and we have no excuse, let alone a reason, for trampling on the rights of conscience. Let us prepare for peace. The way to do this is to train our youth as scholars, citizens, and patriots, not as soldiers.

How to stop war is the question. Not certainly by training our young manhood to think that war is the serious business of life, and education only a side issue. A League of Nations has been formed. Why can it

not patiently educate all nations in the principle of a free democracy. Every adult one vote, no war to be entered into without a referendum of the people. Away with secret diplomacy, and treat all men and all nations as brothers. We know the old saw about how blest is he who gets his blow in first. But if every nation had to take a Referendum it would give all time to think, and would prove most effective in stopping war. When a nation runs amok, as Germany did in our present state of civilisation, all we could do was to meet force with force. But it was a barbarous method. The ideal for the League of Nations should be to educate **every** nation out of that barbarism, and to promote a brotherhood of nations. Where there is a Federation of States, we have State Courts and Federal Courts, and our vast Empire has the House of Lords as a final Court of Appeal. It is only one step further to have International Courts.

Nations have been conquered when they depend upon a professional army. The Hebrew built his wall with weapon in one hand and trowel in the other. In the days of Rome's greatness the Roman left the plough to lead the army. So it will ever be. Trained and fit citizens will defend their homes if the necessity arises; and will do it better than an army drilled till all originality is drilled out of them. Militarism failed in Germany, as it ever will fail. We will not have Prussianism introduced here; we have no desire to train the type of man who murdered Nurse Cavell and sank the Lusitania, that is the full flower of militarism.

The Eternal Father did not plan a world where "might is right."