

Sense and Nonsense

THE REBUILDING OF EUROPE. By David Jayne Hill. Century; \$1.50.

AMERICA AFTER THE WAR. By "An American Jurist." Century; \$1.

Although the war has started an avalanche of historical apologia and special pleading of one sort or another, discussion about the functions and purpose of the state has been amazingly infertile. Practically all that has been written on political theory in the United States, for example, has been a fairly dispassionate analysis of the German theory of the state, which has trailed off, usually, into a splutter of invectives that successfully becloud thought. The attempt at any really honest intellectual examination of first principles has been mere lip service; it has been much easier to reflect the emotional warmth of partisan anger. That excuse was tempting, for no discipline is more formidable than that involved in thinking out conceptions of the state. What is called political science is largely mythology. Nearly every other science has to a great extent emancipated itself from its primitive vagueness by sharply limiting its field of application and by devising its own method and its own set of terms, each of which has a constant and clearly defined meaning. But political science is still in the nebulous stage where sociology, legal history, and quaint bits of metaphysical jargon jostle in splendid confusion. The reason why the Prussian theory of the state is so clearly articulated is that it is not, in reality, a theory of the state at all. It is nothing but an appendage to philosophical and historical, and even religious, theories which often are mere ingenious and intricate systems devised to justify an already existing exploitation.

It is gratifying, then, to find Mr. Hill writing about first principles with such admirable clarity and good temper. "The Rebuilding of Europe" is an honest attempt to paint two conflicting conceptions of the state against a genuine, rather than a partisanly selected, historical background. And the gist of his argument is simplicity itself: his book is a long and detailed attack on the theory of absolute sovereignty. He shows how the early Roman Empire was in one aspect an attempt to form a society of nations wherein the members had certain obligations to the union as a whole. This conception ran directly counter to dynastic ambition, and when medieval Europe emerged, it emerged as a congeries of independent nations free to attack each other at their own pleasure. The Holy Alliance was the attempt—

in many ways successful—to preserve the unlimited right of princes to subdue and control their own people, and to hurl their nation as a whole against any other nation whenever they might think the pastime worth while. This childish conception of absolute sovereignty is far from being a mere relic of medievalism, nor would it be fair to say that only Germany clung to it. What, as Mr. Hill points out, was Rousseau's "la volonté generale" but the old medieval theory, with the people instead of the prince playing the rôle of hero? In 1914 even democracies accepted the absolute sovereignty theory, although they were never so blatant in their profession of it as Germany. It was considered painfully archaic to say that the king could do no wrong, but it was not even questioned that the state could do no wrong. National interests had inalienable rights; they were limited only by opposing rights—which might or might not be stronger. Only war could determine. This anarchy Mr. Hill calls Europe's heritage of evil, although he might as truly have called it the world's heritage of evil. But the bitter experiences of four years of coöperative warfare have made the theory of limited sovereignty extremely popular with democracies. The necessity for common action has revived the ancient concept of public right, so cheerfully flung overboard by the *Realpolitiker*. Under the pressure of events it is coming to have some of its ancient validity. In fact, one of the deepest meanings in this conflict is, shall the idea of absolute sovereignty survive? The whole possibility of any future league of nations goes to ruin unless this idea of absolute sovereignty be destroyed. When Germany, either by military defeat, by revolution, or by a real change of heart due to the disillusion of this war, agrees to limit her sovereignty in those respects where it clashes with public international policy, the war will have been won. And Mr. Hill is fair enough to admit that the Germans do not cling as pertinaciously to the theory of absolute sovereignty as they did four years ago. The voice of reason is not silent even in Central Europe. But it seems to be pretty effectively muffled. Even at this late date the Imperial Chancellor can calmly announce to the world that the relations between Russia and Germany are a purely private affair between those two. The accredited spokesmen of Germany can still talk as if everybody's business is nobody's business—but their own. It must be admitted that this cheerful defense of international anarchy comes today chiefly from Germany. We hear

none of it in Russia, little of it in England or America or even in France, where the nationalistic spirit is probably stronger than in any other country in the world. It is principally in Germany that public men still talk as if they were living in the dark ages. Yet the irony of events is mocking their words. For all their braggadocio, even the Germans have come to see that a first-class power can no longer be self-sufficing. At the very moment when they announce that their unlimited right to act as a sovereign state cannot even be discussed, they dream of an alliance with other states which they call "Middle Europe." And at the very moment their Junkers are loudly proclaiming that international law no longer exists, they are berating Prince Lichnowsky because he had the indiscretion to point out that Germany had not been overscrupulous in observing it. It is an impossible game. Some day Germany will realize that she cannot have it both ways, just as the nations opposed to her have already begun to realize that there is no security for any nation except common international security. Future historians will say that Germany was the worst sufferer from her own doctrines. Mr. Hill's sensible argument is well summed up in this quotation:

In its dynastic sense the word must be eliminated from the vocabulary of international politics. For democracies the word sovereignty in its absolute sense has no meaning. What remains of it and all to which constitutional states can lay claim is merely the right of a free and independent nation to exist, to legislate for itself, to defend itself, and to enter into relations with other similar states on the basis of juristic equality, under principles of international law which respect its inherent rights as free constitutions respect the rights of the individual persons who live under them.

Now to turn from Mr. Hill's sound argument, which has vision but which avoids being just visionary, to the little volume by "An American Jurist" is to experience a shock. It is so pathetically and ridiculously reactionary and stupid that at first one is inclined to believe it a burlesque. For example: "The alliance, or, if preferred, the present coördination, of America with the Entente powers, is entirely fortuitous; it is pursuant to no treaty, or even international conversation. . . . All such alliances are at best but temporary." Again: "To enforce Belgian neutrality is not the primary reason why America engaged in the war against Germany, nor is the violation of the spirit of American democracy the real reason." And later, so that the point won't be missed: "It is to be feared that the American proclamation of democracy as a universal prin-

ciple of government is disquieting to those of our own allies whose régime is aristocratical, if not absolutely monarchical. It takes no note of the real strength of European aristocracies at the present time. Lord Northcliffe has evidently detected this danger, for he has announced that America is not now fighting for democracy. . . In order to abolish monarchy in Europe it will be necessary to uproot the whole social order of all European states except Switzerland. An American propaganda for democracy outside of America is therefore inexpedient, as it tends to shock and alienate the aristocratic classes in the various countries of the European allies of America. . . Americans should bear in mind that it is not absolutely impossible that in some circumstances France may yet become a monarchy and join some future league of the kings." Incredible, you say. But there is more to come. "Whether the future Government of Russia, as it shall be ultimately reorganized, may not take exception and umbrage to the speedy recognition by America of the Revolution remains to be seen." And after the war? Well, "the real test" will come "when politicians begin their mischievous appeals for total disarmament and for the neglect of our war defensive with the hope of capturing a discontented and impoverished people. If democracy passes through the ordeal safely, proves conservative, and continues to exhibit an intelligent and elevated political outlook, discarding the coming socialistic program of extreme political demagogues, the republic will be safe for a long, a conservative, and an interesting future." There is really no need of quoting further; unless one saw it in black and white, it would seem utterly impossible that such senile stupidity could be published and read seriously today. Yet it is probably true that the author—who ought some day to be glad that he remained anonymous—considered that he was writing a shrewd and well balanced argument against the tender-minded shibboleths of our time: democracy, the league of nations, socialism, the elimination of war, progressive disarmament, free trade, and so on. That is the pity of it. It is a joke, of course, but a rather sorry joke for the millions of young men who are going through the ordeal by fire so that a somewhat different and somewhat more rational international system may emerge. They are hardly fighting to make the world safe for this kind of international anarchy, which seems so agreeable to the prejudices and unyielding perversity of unteachable old men.

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