

(December 19, 1921.)

War and Peace

BY LORD CAVAN.

Mr. President, Gentlemen of the Canadian Club of Toronto.—I have only one real regret about the war and the part that I played in it myself, which is that my connection with the Canadian Corps was so slight as almost to be negligible, I know a great deal about you, perhaps more than you think I know. The first thing I heard about the Canadians was when they first came alongside me, that I had better look out for everything that belonged to me.

We first met at Festubert. We had shrapnel with which to break down the German entrenchments. We had one round of six inch shell per hour, and with that preliminary bombardment with no high explosive, and no barrage, your—I cannot tell you the number, but one of your brigades and one of my Guards brigades attempted to advance side by side about 200 yards. We lost a great many men, and that was the result of that battle.

Then things began to improve, as you know. The next experience of the Canadians was this; in June 1916 one early morning about 6 o'clock I took the Prince of Wales, who was on my staff, up with me, to walk around our line at Wilchy, which was the left of my line. We were walking very peacefully around the line on a nice quiet morning until about 8 o'clock and suddenly an extraordinary severe bombardment began just to our right. I stopped at the next headquarters to telephone and was told the Canadians were to the right. I told the Prince we would just go down the next communicating trench and see Bingo, and ask what we will do. I then got into my car having got him safely back, which I was glad of, and I went to see your General at Abiel. This was about 11 o'clock. He said that the bombardment was still going on, and I said, "Well, I have got a whole division in reserve; would you like me to move it down nearer you?" He said, "Not yet; all will be well." Then you know the rest; the tremendously severe attack; the loss of your General Mercer. And then your general having collected pretty well all the guns in France set to work and regained the ground that you temporarily lost.

My next experience with the Canadians was from another angle altogether. I thought I didn't have any particular job to do that particular day of the battle when you took Courcellette. I went along the line to the left. I was on your right. I went up in a balloon and I saw the barrage start, a perfect barrage, along a perfectly spread line, and I saw the men start. And then I saw the German reply start, and after that I saw nothing for smoke or dust, so that as regards actually seeing a battle from a balloon I do not recommend it. That was one of your greatest successes, but I am sorry to say I did not see it.

Meanwhile, your Chairman has kindly referred to my beloved Guards. When I had finished commanding the Guards' Division and Sir Douglas Haig gave me the 14th Corps I was just a little sad for a minute, until I said to him, "May the Guards comprise part of the 14th Corps?" And I saw him smile and I knew that meant yes. Well, then I was happy. With the 14th Corps and the Guards Division, while you were taking Courcellette, we did have a glorious day on September 25th. General B , commanding the 20th Corps, met me on the far side of the city and fell upon my neck and kissed me.

And we heard of a battle called Vimy Ridge. I can tell you quite honestly, gentlemen, the Army thought that the most complete victory that had been gained up to that time. I think so still. I understand that the next day your own Corps commander came around and addressed the troops, thanking them for what they had done in the capture of Vimy Ridge, and he said, "That was not bad, but you must do better next time." That was so like him. He is one of my very best friends, and I am glad, gentlemen, you have got such a Governor General.

Then came the third battle of Ypres, where, gentlemen, I think we made a mistake. This is only my opinion, but I do not think really that we ought to have employed the Canadian Corps right around through at Passchendael. I think this and I have not been saying anything that I did not say before General Haig's face, because I have said it to his face. When that battle began on July 31 my corps was on the extreme left and we crossed the Ypres canal and took the ridge there which we had wanted for years, and it was the first time when you had that ridge that you could move around in Ypres and along the canal without the Germans looking at you. I said, "We have got this ridge. I can hold it with one division. I think you ought to reinforce on the right and center." And

I believe if we had done that we would have had Passchendael in a month. That is only my opinion but it is an honest bit of military opinion. But for various reasons that battle was fought the other way and it took a very long time as you know to take Passchendael.

Then, after that, as I told you, my connection with you was very slight because in November of that year there was a disaster in Italy. Five German divisions broke through the Italian lines and I was sent off as hard as I could go with the 7th, 23rd, and 48th, to Italy.

May I just say one or two words about that campaign because I think it is so very little known or understood by those whose duties were far harder and whose glory was far greater, those who fought in France in 1918. However, what happened was this. I took the Prince of Wales, who was still on my staff, and my Chief of Staff down with me as quickly as possible into Italy. The divisions, of course, were coming on by train after us. And we got into a motor car when we got in the western part of that great plain, and we drove in a motor the whole way up to Trarico on the extreme right of the plain, and we were met by 60,000 Italians, without arms and without officers, and I began to think there must be somebody coming along behind them and was not at all happy, being in a motor car, unarmed, with the Prince of Wales, so I warned the chauffeur to be ready to turn around at an instant's warning. But we got to where the General Commander in Chief of the Italian armies was to receive us and he quickly told us to hurry up the troops that all would yet be well. In a fortnight the troops arrived. There was immediately the question of where to detain them. It was obviously bad to detain them in the middle of the battle area, and yet if we detained them too far back it would be too late when we got them up. We detained a 100 k.m. march from the front. We did that march in the face of big difficulties. In the meantime the Italian Third Army and the Italian Cavalry held the enemy on the Piave. There we stayed a fortnight and then went south, and after a month or two we were sent up into the mountain sector of Asiago. When I got up there I was not quite at ease because I was told to use an Italian road that was to the left of my sector, and come down by a French road to the right of my sector. Well, I did not mind that so long as conditions were peaceful, but if we were to get on, and we wanted to get on (we were making plans for an attack), I wanted a road of my own. So on January 1 I told the Italian commander I would like a road of my own. "Oh certainly,"

he said, "nothing easier. I will give you 3,000 men; you needn't worry; whereabouts would you like it?" "Well," I said, "I would like it nearer the center of my sector." "Very good." On the 3rd of January 3,000 Italians started to make that road and on the 27th of March I went up one of the finest roads of Europe where two lorries could meet and pass each other all the way up and down.

We were going to attack, as I told you, across due north into the Trentino when news arrived on the 5th of June that the Austrians were going to attack us at 6.45 a.m. Very pleasant! Just what war ought to be. And at 6.45 exactly, after an all night bombardment that was severe, certainly, and well directed, but not so severe as some of the bombardments I had seen in France, but still we did have a number of casualties from it, and exactly at the hour named the Austrians attacked. Needless to say it was not successful. After the failure of the attack it was perfectly obvious that the Austrians were demoralized, because I ordered General Babington to make a raid, after the example that you had set us, but not the sort of silly little raid of 30 men or so, but of a whole division, in broad daylight, without a single preliminary bombardment. Simply go over the top, out in the open, and see what happened. Well, what happened was we took 100 prisoners, 6 guns, 90 machine guns, and they had 4 casualties. Well, gentlemen, I got into my car and went off to see General Diaz and said, "Let me go and the French, and we will go straight to Trent—now, this afternoon, or to-morrow morning. But Diaz, he is a fine fellow and I wouldn't say anything against him, a fine fellow, but his hands were absolutely tied by his Government, said he had no reserves. He had to use reserves. "But," I said, "You don't need reserves. Here is a glorious chance." "Maybe," he said. But he was firm. Perhaps he was right, but I don't think so. I told him so the other day.

But, gentlemen, all through the month of July, August, September, we sat still. I was very unhappy. They were really my three unhappiest months of the war. I knew what was going on. I knew what you did on August 8th, a 14,000 yard advance. Better than Vimy still. Your Governor General was right, you see. And there we were, doing nothing. But at last the decision was made that we would attack. If I had time I would explain to you the plan. It was General Diaz's plan, a soldier-like plan, well worked out. And it avoided all the mistakes that the Italians had made in the early part of the war, and also avoided the mistake of attacking over

very difficult passes which at the end of October and November proved a very bad pitfall owing to the snow. So he attacked north east to Vittorio-Veneto, and, I am proud to say, he gave me command of the 10th Italian Army. We crossed the Piave after various bothers, with a river running eight knots, a mile and a half broad, not very deep it is true, but if a river is four feet deep, and running eight knots, it is very hard to keep your feet. However, we had the assistance throughout of about 60 Italian boatmen who ferried my British divisions across to an island, starting at least a mile above where they wanted to land, and they behaved with supreme gallantry in spite of being fired on, having casualties and so on, and they landed my forces on to the island. We captured that island to start with and we remained there two days all in the one trench that runs all through the island, which was extremely heavily shelled with extremely good shooting to 200 yards in front of it and 200 yards behind, but did not hurt anybody. Then we had to cross the rest of the stream, and engage in the rest of the battle after the stiff fight to get on to the far side, in which the artillery and the Manchesters greatly distinguished themselves. We pushed on and had another fight at a river called Monticano and there an interesting thing happened. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry, only a handful, used as cavalry, whom I sent out to see if they could stop any efforts to blow up the bridges, spread themselves over the country, and seized the main bridge over the river absolutely at the moment that the man was going to put the match to it, and they got there just in time. They killed the man and we used that bridge, and that enabled us to pursue the enemy with great vigor right away up to ever so far—30 or 40 miles.

Well, gentlemen, all that was arranged and planned and helped in every way by my friend here, General Mitchell.

Well, gentlemen, you know all about the final fighting in 1918. That was our little contribution to it. Now may I pass to something different.

Just compare the success of the war for one moment with the success that has been already completed and will be created at Washington. The victory in the war was the necessary preliminary to the Washington Conference. The Washington Conference, in my mind, although I am a soldier, is a fine corollary to the victory.

Now there are two things—I have said this before in Montreal and Ottawa, and I say it again here—there are two things that stick right out at that Washington Conference; one is honesty of purpose, and the other is determination to achieve.

May I just run through quickly what has been done. First of all I would say that preliminary peace conferences at the Hague, called by the Czar some years ago, have really resulted in nothing but peace resolutions that war is a terrible thing. Now what happened here at Washington? From the moment that Mr. Hughes made his world-famous speech in which the United States said, "We give up the whole of our program up to several years ahead in ship building; we will scrap ships already completed, scrap them, sink them, and you shall come and see it done. Now then what will you do?" Gentlemen, there is no bluff about that; perfectly genuine; perfectly sincere, and it will be done.

Now we come to China. Certain great powers have acquired, let us say, lands in China. If you had said to anybody who studies world affairs two months ago, three powers are going to give up their lands in China you would have been laughed at. But what really has happened is this; France is giving up Kiao Chau; the British, Wei-hai-Wei, and Japan Shan Tung. Well, that really is a perfectly marvellous accomplishment.

Then, there is the Anglo-Japanese Alliance question, and those of you who did not read Mr. Balfour's speech on that subject I beg to do so. It really was one of the finest things I ever listened to in my life, and it is futile for me to attempt to paraphrase it or in any way repeat what he said. But the result is perfectly pleasing to Japan, perfectly satisfactory to the United States, and perfectly satisfactory to France, and that, gentlemen, I am perfectly convinced, ensures the peace of the world for at least ten years over one third of the globe.

The question of ships, of the ratio, which means that the British Empire will have an equal fleet with the United States, superior by the ratio of five to three to Japan, will be all settled satisfactorily if France and Italy will listen to the arguments that the United States, Great Britain and Japan put before them, bearing in mind, as I think they will, that the conference at Washington is for the limitation of armaments and not the increase of armaments.

I am told that I am not a financier and I hesitate for one single moment even to touch the word, but I am told by business men in the United States and Canada that if the Washington conference does succeed in limiting the ships, in securing the peace of the Pacific and in betterment of relations all round (just what I think we practically have succeeded in doing), that confidence in business must be automatically restored and that the question of increased trade will of course

help the question of unemployment, and it can only make for good. I trust that is so, and I trust further that the example of Washington may be contagious, and by that I mean this; that another conference may be called perhaps not next year, or the year after, but any time you like, it doesn't matter when, so long as it is called, embracing all the nations, the fighting nations, including our late enemies and Russia. Then, and not until then, would it be safe in any way to tie our hands as regards land armament, gas aeronautics, bombing. All those are serious questions. I have no time to deal with them now, but obviously if you want in any way to tie your hands on any of these points you must have universal agreement, and not an agreement of several nations sitting at Washington, while nations with large armies, such as Turkey, Greece, Roumania, Czecho-Slovakia, and Jugo-Slavia are all free to do as they like. Our conscience as regards reduction of land armaments is absolutely clear. I will touch this afternoon when I address the Empire Club, on the commitments of Empire. Well gentlemen, I am in the responsible position, as you know, of commanding the troops at Aldershot, and it is my business to see they are ready for defence. They have been engaged elsewhere during this last year, as you know. But I hope, I pray, that the settlement in Ireland will give me my soldiers back at Aldershot. I hope that I may get them into a state even half as efficient as the "Old Contemptibles," and I hope never to lose sight of the fact that although I welcome all conferences that make for the peace of the world, yet the safety, honor and welfare of his Majesty and his Dominions must be the first call.