

PUBLIC FORUM

Editor, WINNETKA TALK—

"I have the utmost appreciation of the work Dr. J. W. F. Davies has done in this community and I wish this to be understood in everything I say here in answer to his statement published in the TALK of April 24 in regard to the war cannons which have been obtained by Winnetka Post No. 10 of the American Legion. But that statement seems to me to be based on so total a misapprehension of the ideas of the Legion in bringing the war cannons to Winnetka, that I think a statement of our position should be made.

"Dr. Davies feels that we are proposing to deify war and these instruments of destruction. So extreme a statement forces one to think that he has thought about the question so much from his own point of view that he has become morbid and warped, on this subject, for certainly there is nothing further from our minds. Nor do I think his feeling is general.

"We look on these cannons first as interesting pieces of artillery, and second as reminders of the great war—a struggle so great that to most of those of us who were in the service, whether we will or no, all the rest of life, as someone has said, must seem like an anti-climax. The guns do not mean sacrifices, the loyalty, the patriotism, the whole great panorama of those two tremendous years and the final victory. Surely it is not already base to recall those struggles, and that our country with her great allies was victorious.

"After the Civil War men brought home their muskets and swords and hung them in their living rooms and libraries, and there they still remain, or in the homes of their proud sons and grandsons, not as reminders of murder and destruction but as mementoes of loyal service to one's country, a heritage to be passed on in every home which is honored with such a heritage.

"The war cannons of the Civil War were placed in the parks of thousands of villages and cities and towns all over the United States. Today in England war cannons surround the English memorials to their war dead. So universal is the custom of using war guns as memorials of the past, both in homes and in public parks, that it is impossible to believe that any but a very small minority can think of them as does Dr. Davies.

"I recall that some Winnetkans strongly opposed the Otis Memorial for the Village Common because it would bring memories of sadness to the Children of Winnetka. They felt that they should have happiness and joy held up before them. Well, life is not all happiness and joy, life has its struggles and griefs, and if we teach our children that all is happiness and joy, if we forget to teach them that "it is man's perdition to be safe when for the truth he ought to die," we teach them falsely and lead them to bitterness and perhaps grievous failure in life.

"A prominent Winnetkan recently insisted that no pictures of the Illinois troops in France should be shown the school children unless they showed war as utterly destructive and debasing. Of course war is not that. President Eliot vigorously resented that dictum in 1916, and declared that of his friends who served in the Civil War not one but was gentler, truer and kinder when he left the service of his country than he had been before he entered it. I can say from my own experience that of my friends who saw action every one is to my mind a little gentler, kind-

er and nobler than he was before—more tolerant, indeed, of the weaknesses of others than those like myself who did not see action.

"But the result is that we cannot show war as anything but grim and forbidding, and we cannot show it as grim and forbidding. We cannot speak of it in any way. It would seem to follow that what is desired is to forget the war. We should erase it from our memories.

"Well, we cannot erase it from our memories. And if we could, it would be wicked to do so. In the first place, nothing is gained by forgetting the past, ignoring it, denying it. We must build on the past. In the second place, the memories of the war are a precious heritage to pass on to those who follow us. William James, an ardent peace man, said in 1909: "Ask all our millions, north and south, whether they would vote (were such a thing possible) to have our war for the Union expunged from history, and the record of a peaceful transition to the present time substituted for that of its marches and battles, and probably hardly a handful of eccentrics would say yes. Those ancestors, those efforts, those memories and legends are the most ideal part of what we now own together, a sacred spiritual possession worth more than all the blood poured out. But ask those same people whether they would be willing in cold blood to start another civil war now to gain another similar possession and not one man or woman would vote for the proposition."

"We are a very forgetful and casual nation. We take too much for granted. We are prosperous and have comforts and luxuries undreamed of by the generations past. Our children must not be allowed to grow up thinking that all they have has come by some sort of magic and that it can be kept without struggle, privation and devotion to their country's welfare. They must learn that the making of this continent was only accomplished by heartbreaking toil, by long exile in the wilderness, the arduous clearing of forests, and draining of swamps, by suffering from fever and disease, by fights with Indians, by a great war for independence and another great civil war for the Union, and in our own times by a great world war to prevent the domination of the world and their own country by a vicious militaristic despotism. It may be that these things could have been obtained in other ways. They actually were obtained only in the way history tells us. And in whatever way free government may be maintained and kept, it can only be by ceaseless vigilance, by devotion of the citizen to his tasks, by giving one's self to a cause beyond himself.

"It may be, God grant, that we shall never have another war. I doubt if we have the right to teach our children that we never shall have another war in view of the fact that twice within five years we have had serious friction with a great power between which and us there is a fundamental question which tact and persuasion may remove but which no world court and no league of nations can ever arbitrate for us.

"But if there is no war again, the lessons of the sacrifices of the past are still an enormous stimulus to the performance of the duties of peace. At my college, the president, the professors, the prominent alumni and visitors ceased to hold up before us the example of the men who died in the Civil War, not to urge us to fight, but to teach us that if war came we must, if we were worthy of our past, try to carry on the great tradition, and if it did not come to bear our part as citizens to keep our country true to its great history.

"In the last election in Winnetka, the Woman's Voters League recalled the Winnetka Memorial Day celebrations and said that their memory should inspire us to do our duty on primary day.

"Constantly, then, the memory of the Civil War was held up before us, the Civil War cannons were in every village green, and yet they did not make us militaristic or encourage war. When the great war came it found us profoundly peaceful—so determinedly peaceful, in fact, that we delayed entering the war long after we should have gone in.

"The war cannons will do their part to remind us and future generations that their country has a big and momentous past. James Bryce in his American Commonwealth, writing of our middle western cities, said that in "pacing their busy streets and admiring their handsome city halls, and churches, one's heart sinks at the feeling that nothing historically interesting ever has happened here, perhaps will never happen."

"Well, if nothing historical has happened in our cities, events of great moment have happened to our people. If Winnetka has not been the scene of great events, her people have witnessed them and participated in them, and that memory must not be allowed to die. The war cannons will help to remind us that the past at least is secure."

—Edward R. Lewis.

CANNON AS MONUMENTS

There is a certain poetic symbolism in blue birds that nest in silent cannon and in happy children that clamber over them in their play. For it is the way of life to cover up the ugly with the beautiful. We could not live in this world if it were not so. In time of actual warfare, certain of the finest qualities of human beings are conspicuously brought into play and in the light of this unquestionable fact, we find many sincere people justifying war. Ought we not rather to believe, that there is something lacking in our present education, which does not train the individual to use himself completely in times of peace?

There are two noticeable aspects of war, the selfish, vindictive side which is symbolized by the cannon and the sacrificial, cooperative side which is symbolized by the flag. It seems to me an easy thing to decide which of these symbols shall become familiar to our children. The more difficult thing to see is that the fine, sacrificial side of human beings needs greater expression in every day life. We ought not to be content to preserve a cruel institution like war in order to give it sporadic expression but should be stretching every nerve to find and introduce into our education, what the sociologist calls, "psychic equivalents" for war. I doubt, very much, whether we are lending our aid on the side of this education, when we use cannon as monuments about our village.

—Charlotte L. McKenzie

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