

CHAPTER V

THE DECLARATION OF WASHINGTON

THE Great War of 1914-18 had not only been the greatest war in history, it had also been the greatest argument about war that had ever stormed through the human mind. The Fourteen Points of President Wilson, the vague, unjustifiable promises of Crewe House to a repentant Germany, had been more effective than any battle. And now this great war the Lord Paramount had launched was taking on the same quality of an immense and uncontrollable argument.

In the long run man will be lost or saved by argument, for collective human acts are little more than arguments in partial realization.

And now that strange mixture of forward-reaching imagination, hardy enterprise, exalted aims, and apparently inseparable cynicism which makes the American character a wonder and perplexity for the rest of mankind was to become the central reality of the Lord Paramount's mind.

The argument was given definite form by an entirely characteristic American action on the part of the President. He issued a declaration, which was to be known in history as the declaration of Washington, in which, illogically enough since his country was at war, he proposed to decline any

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further fighting. America, he said, was not too proud but too sane to continue the conflict. He did not add, the Lord Paramount remarked, as he might have done, that the Battle of the North Atlantic had left her quite incapable for a time of any further effective intervention in Europe or Asia. Everything she had left she needed to watch Japan. But that factor in the question the President ignored—shamelessly. And he said things fellows like Hamp or Camelford or Atterbury might have said. He said things Sir Bussy would have cheered. He was the first head of a state to come out definitely on the side of the forces that are undermining and repudiating history.

This declaration of inaction, this abandonment of militant nationalism flew like an arrow athwart the Atlantic into the hands and into the mental storm of the Lord Paramount. The document presented itself a hasty duplicate from some transmitting machine, in smudged purple lettering, and he paced his bureau with it in his hand and read it aloud to his always faithful listener. An inner necessity obliged him to read it aloud, distasteful though it was in every line. This great denial was worded with that elaborate simplicity, that stiffly pompous austerity, which has long been the distinctive style of American public utterances.

“There has arisen suddenly out of the momentary failure of one young airman’s skill in Persia a great and terrible crisis in the affairs of

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the world. With an incredible rapidity the larger part of mankind has fallen again into warfare. The material of warfare stood ready to explode, and there was no other means sufficiently available to avert this collapse. All over our planet, beyond every precedent, men are now slaying and destroying. These United States have not been able to remain aloof. Already our battleships have fought and thousands of our sons have been killed, and were it not for the ingrained sanity upon our northern and southern boundaries, all this continent also would be aflame.

“Yet the fortunate position of our territories and our practical community of ideas with the great dominion to the north of us still hold us aloof from the extremer carnage. That and the naval strength that still remains to us, suffice to keep our homeland untouched by the daily and nightly horrors that now threaten the civilian life in all the crowded cities of Europe and Asia. Our share in this work of devastation, as far as we are disposed to take a share, depends upon our willingness to attack. So far we have attacked and will attack only to stay the hand of the destroyer. It is still possible for the people of the American communities, almost alone now among all the communities of the world, to sleep soundly of nights, to spend days untroubled by the immediate sounds and spectacle of battle, to think and exchange thought with deliberation, and to consider the rights and possibilities of this tragic explosion of human evil. It is our privilege and our

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duty now to sit in judgment upon this frightful spectacle as no other people in the world can do.

““ It would be easy—indeed, for some of us Americans it has already been too easy—to find in our present relative advantage the recognition of peculiar virtues, the reward of distinctive wisdom. I will not lend myself to any such unctuous patriotism. It is for the historians of a coming day to apportion the praise and blame among the actors in this world catastrophe. Perhaps no actors are guilty; perhaps they are impelled by forces greater than themselves to fulfil the rôles prepared for them; perhaps it is not men and nations, but ideas and cultures that we should arraign. What matters now is that justly or unjustly we Americans have been favoured by fortune and granted unequalled privileges. We can serve the world now as no other people can do. In serving the world, we shall also serve ourselves. Upon us, if upon any people, has been bestowed, for the second and supreme occasion, the power of decision between world peace or world destruction.

““ Let us, in no spirit of boasting or nationalistic pride, but with thankfulness and humility, consider the peculiar nature of these United States. In their political nature they are unlike anything that has ever existed before. They are not sovereign states as sovereign states are understood in any other part of the world. They were sovereign states, but they have ceded to a common federal government that much of their freedom that might have led to warfare. Not without dire

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distress and passion and bloodshed did our forefathers work out this continental peace. The practical and intellectual difficulties were very great. It was hard to determine what was of local and what of general concern. To this day many points remain debatable. On the issue whether our labour should be here bound and here free, we spilt the lives of a generation. We learnt that we must make all labour free forever if progress was to continue. Not always have we been wise and noble in our career. Much that we have learnt we have learnt in suffering and through error. Nevertheless, our huge community, year by year and generation by generation, since its liberty was won, has been feeling its way towards the conception of an enduring and universal peace, has been seeking by pacts and propaganda some way of organizing a permanent peace in the world. It has become our tradition so far as we can be said to have a tradition. No other great mass of human beings has ever had so clear and active a peace disposition as our consolidated peoples. To us warfare has become a thing unnecessary and horrible, as intolerable as many another harsh and frightful custom, horrible and unpardonable now as human sacrifice and as that holocaust of victims at a chieftain's burial which once seemed integral to social life. We know, and have gone far to realize in fact, that the life of all human beings can be fearless and free.

“ ‘ And if we have gone cautiously in our search for peace, avoiding above all things any entangling

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alliances with Powers organized on the militant pattern of the past, that separateness has not been because we, unmindful of our common humanity, were disposed to a selfish and sluggish isolation from the less happily circumstanced states of the Old World. It is rather because from our beginning and through the great wisdom of our chief founder Washington, we have been aware of the immense dangers that lurk in so mighty a proposition, so intricate and gigantic a project as world organization. It has been our steadfast determination that our naïve and ever-increasing strength should not be tricked into the service of Old World hates and Old World ambitions. From the utterances of President Wilson, through notes and memoranda and messages and conferences, to the days of the Kellogg Pact, the voice of America has been plainly for peace on earth and goodwill between all kinds of men.

““ In the past twelve years we have experienced much, seen much, thought and discussed abundantly, and it becomes clearer and clearer in our minds; it is a matter now of common remark and agreement, that we must regard all states and governments of to-day merely as the trustees and temporary holders of power for that universal conciliation and rule to which all things are tending. Here, as the elected head of your federal government, I can say plainly that no man on earth whatever owes more than a provisional allegiance to the rulers he may find above him, and that his profounder, his fundamental loyalty, is to no flag

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or nation, but to mankind. I say this of our constitution and of our flag as of all other flags and constitutions. The frightful suffering, bloodshed, and destruction of this present moment call to every man to turn his mind and hopes towards that federal government of the world whose creation, steadfastly and speedily, is now the urgent task before our race. Such rulers and ministers as fail to subserve this coalescence now are, we declare, no less than traitors to their human blood, the traitor slaves of dead imaginations and superannuated organizations.

“And so we, the government and people of the United States, stand out of this warfare just as completely as it is possible for us to stand out of it, armed and watchful, seeking some form of intervention that will bring it to an end. We issue our invitations to all such powers as remain still hesitating and neutral in this confusion of hates, to gather in conference, a conference not simply now for treaties, promises, and declarations, but for the establishment forthwith of united activities and unified controls, that shall never cease from operation henceforth. And we appeal not only to sovereign states to realize this conception of which our people has become the guardian and exponent; we appeal to every free-minded individual man and woman in the world. We say to all and sundry, “Stand out of this warfare. Refuse to be belligerent. Withdraw your services, withdraw your resources.” We are honest and loyal in our endeavour, we are acting upon the accumulated

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resolve of a century and a half, and we call to you for a loyalty transcending flag or country. So far as we of these States can assist and support your action, without intensifying the bitterness of conflict, we will. Restrain your rulers. Give yourselves now to that possible Empire of Peace, in which we and you and all the life that stirs upon this planet may cooperate together.' ”

The reader paused.

He took a deep breath, made three paces to the window, and turned. He held out the paper and patted it. “There it is,” he said. “It was bound to come. There it is, plain and clear—the bolt that has been gathering force and weight—the moral attack.”

He paced. “Propaganda with a vengeance. An attack on our morale more deadly than a thousand aeroplanes.”

He stopped short. “Was there ever such hypocrisy?” he demanded.

“Never,” said Mrs. Pinchot stoutly. “It’s revolting.”

“They pressed us with their fleet building. They bullied and quarrelled when we were only too ready for acquiescent action. They Shylocked Europe. And then all this humanitarian virtue!”

Something seemed to twist round in the mind of the Lord Paramount, something that twisted round and struck at his heart. He could not maintain his indignant pose. This Presidential address suddenly allied itself with things that had lain dormant in his mind for weeks, things he associated



“‘Where am I?’ said the Lord
across his brow. ‘Who am I?’



Paramount and passed his hand
. . . A delusion and a dream? '3'

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with men like Camelford (and, by the by, where on earth was Camelford?) and Sir Bussy. He stopped short in his pacing, with the typed copy of the address, held by one corner, dangling from his fingers.

"Suppose," said the Lord Paramount, "it is not hypocrisy! Suppose he really means the things he has said here! In spite of his patriots."

He stared at Mrs. Pinchot, and she was staring back at him.

"But how can he mean things that don't mean anything?" She stuck to it loyally.

"But they *do* mean something. They *do* mean something. Even if they don't mean it straight. Suppose this is humbug. I believe this is humbug. But humbug does not pretend to be something unless it pays to do so. There must be something to which it appeals. What is that something? What is that shapeless drive? Such history as I have ever taught or studied. A world without flags or nations. A sordid universal peace. The end of history. It's in the air; it's in the age. It is what Heaven has sent me to dispute and defeat. A delusion. A dream. . . ."

"Where am I?" said the Lord Paramount and passed his hand across his brow. "Who am I? . . . A delusion and a dream? One or other is a delusion—this new world or mine?"