

WHY THE WOMEN OF THE NATIONS MET IN WAR-TIME.

The Women's International League was started by a number of women from many nations, both those which are fighting and those which are not, who had made up their mind that such a calamity as this awful war must never happen again. They realised that it was no good waiting till the end of the war to begin their work, because it is the things which are being done *now*, and the spirit which is growing up in people *now*, which will make it easy or difficult to keep peace in the future. They realised, too, that one nation alone could not prevent wars; it must be the work of all. So they had a meeting, last spring, in Holland, of delegates from all the different countries, to see whether they could agree as to what caused wars and how wars could be prevented.

There were women from Germany there, and women from Great Britain; women from Austria, and women from Belgium. Yet, strange to say, they all agreed about what was wrong and what must be altered.

In the first place, they all agreed that the chief cause of wars was the cause of many other evils too; it was the fact that a great many people still think that "Might is Right," that "He should take who has the power, and he should keep who can." This is impressed on their minds from the time they are children, by the way women are treated, because they are physically weaker than men. Women are shut out from any share in government and from all sorts of professions and privileges, not because they are less good or less wise than men, but because they are *not so strong*. When the same principle is applied to nations, it leads to the ill-treatment of the small nations: they are weak, so the big nations trample on them. It leads to the bullying of all other nations by that one which thinks itself the strongest; and it leads to WAR, which is, after all, nothing but a way of finding out which nation is strongest. People sometimes talk as if the result of a war could show which nation was right; but, of course, it cannot, any more than a fight between two boys can show which is right. The big boy may be quite wrong, but he is almost sure to beat the little boy. These women, therefore, decided that to go to the root of the matter they must fight against this idea that might is right

wherever it showed itself, for so long as it was accepted there would be wars. That is why in their "objects" they say that they stand for the emancipation of women and for the protection of the rights and interests of children and young people. They maintain that all people should have, as far as possible, what it is right and just that they should have—not what they are strong enough to take. They further maintain that the same principle should apply to nations, and that if any nation had a grievance, it should be able, instead of fighting, to ask the other nations to redress this grievance, with a fair certainty that, if what it wanted was right and just, it would be done. For this we should, of course, need some sort of International Court on which all the nations should be represented, before which such questions could be brought, and all the nations must agree to boycott any nation which disobeyed it. But to make any such scheme workable, we shall have to have a different spirit in all nations from what we have to-day. At present each nation wants to grab all it can get, and people are amazed and horrified at the suggestion that any nation should voluntarily give up anything to another. But why should it not? We cannot live happily together in our homes unless we are prepared to give as well as take. Why should nations be any more selfish than individuals? We get the best results by putting the good of everybody before the good of any one person. Should we not in the same way get the best results by putting the good of the whole world before the good of any one nation?

That is what the women of the International League believe, and that is why they want to influence people's minds so that in the peace which ends this war, and in all that follows, the first aim shall be, not the selfish gains of any one nation, but the peace and happiness of the whole world.

If these ideas were accepted it would not be possible for one nation to seize territory from another. The fact that they were strong enough to *take* it would not be considered to give them any *right* to it. Indeed, the only people who would have a right to say under what rule the territory should be, would be the people living in it, for, after all, the country belongs to the people, and cannot be dealt with apart from them. Moreover, the sense of injustice which must always be felt when anything is taken away by force by someone stronger, is sure to make fresh wars. The person robbed will only wait to be strong enough to get back what he has lost. In short, no settlement can be permanent unless it is felt to be just by everyone concerned.

And in the meantime, whilst people's minds are being trained to this idea, the Women's International League is trying, in every country, to fight against all the influences which make nations go to war. They find, for instance, that in every country there are

people who make a great deal of money out of the preparations for war: that is the people who build ships, and make guns and ammunition, and all the things that are needed for an army and navy. So the women ask that this temptation should be removed by the Government making what preparations it must, until war is abolished, in workshops of its own, so that no private firms or individuals should be able to enrich themselves by goading people on to make war.

Wars are often brought about, too, by quarrels over opportunities for trade in less civilised countries. The capitalists of the different countries quarrel, and then their Governments take it up and make the whole nation fight for the enrichment of a few individuals. The Women's International League, therefore, asks for as much freedom as possible for all nations to trade together—that they should not try to shut each other out, but to give equal chances to everybody. For not only will this prevent quarrels, but it will be better for the mass of the people in *all* the countries, who will get the necessaries of life cheaper. Also they ask that if the traders and the people who invest their money in foreign countries do get into trouble, they should look after themselves, and not, as they do to-day, be able to ask their Government to look after them, and even to fight to protect their money.

They ask, too, that power should be given to the *people*—that is, all the sane, grown men and women in the country—to decide whether they will go to war or not, and whether they will be friends with other nations, or always envying them and trying to get the better of them. At present all these matters are decided by a few politicians and diplomatists who have got the idea into their heads that Europe must be divided into two parties, and that every country must belong to one party or the other, and be ready to fight if any member of its party quarrels with any member of the other party. The women of the International League believe that if the people were really consulted they would say, in every country, that they don't want to quarrel or to be dragged into other people's quarrels, but to live in peace and friendliness with all their neighbours.

And, finally, they are prepared to resist energetically the introduction of Conscription as a permanent thing into this country, for that would mean that all the boys would be brought up to be soldiers, and taught to think that fighting was the proper way of settling quarrels.

If you think that this is sense, please help on the work *now*. Join the League if you can, but, anyway, do everything possible to make people realise that the thing to think of at the end of this war is not how we may be revenged, or what we can get,

or anything of that sort, but just how we can save our children and our children's children from what we are going through to-day. And we shall not do this if we leave any nation feeling justly aggrieved and sore, or if we allow anything taken by force to be kept, or if, in short, we in any way admit that might should be recognised as right. And we must be prepared to act up to this ourselves as well as to ask other people to do it, and to make sacrifices if the peace of Europe requires it. But people are not going to change round suddenly at the end of the war, so if we want to make these things possible we must struggle *now* and all the time against the terrible spirit of hatred of their "enemies" which is poisoning so many people's minds to-day.

Moreover, we must try to bring up the children—and to insist that they shall be brought up in the schools—to believe in justice and not force, and to respect the rights of other people and other nations.

If we all do this we shall go far towards building up the new world we all long for, in which there shall be no more war.

If you would like to know more about this, address a post-card to the

*Secretary of the Women's International League,
12, Little College Street,
Westminster,*

and write on the other side, "Please send me more information about the Women's International League," and your name and address, and post it to us; or, if you live anywhere near, come in and see us.