

Crown Prince Wilhelm on the Prospect of War, 1913

In the extract Wilhelm - the son of Kaiser Wilhelm II and heir to the throne - enthused about the prospect of war in Europe, arguing that peace was un-advantageous to Germany.

Today, indeed, we live in a time which points with special satisfaction to the proud height of its culture, which is only too willing to boast of its international cosmopolitanism, and flatters itself with visionary dreams of the possibility of an everlasting peace throughout the world.

This view of life is un-German and does not suit us. The German who loves his people, who believes in the greatness and the future of our homeland, and who is unwilling to see its position diminished, dare not close his eyes in the indulgence of dreams such as these, he dare not allow himself to be lulled into indolent sleep by the lullabies of peace.

Germany has behind her since the last great war a period of economic prosperity, but comfort has so increased in all circles of our people that luxury and claims to a certain style of life have weakened us.

Now certainly we must not thanklessly deny that a wave of economic prosperity brings with it much that is good. But the shady side of this too rapid development often manifests itself in a painful and threatening manner. Already the appreciation of wealth has gained in our country an importance which we can only observe with anxiety.

The old ideals, even the position and the honour of the nation, may be sympathetically affected; for peace, peace at any price, is necessary for the undisturbed acquisition of money.

But the study of history teaches us that all those States which in the decisive hour have been guided [only by the desire to gain money] have miserably come to grief. The sympathies of civilized nations are today, as in the battles of antiquity, still with the sturdy and the bold fighting armies; they are with the brave combatants who are soldiers for their country, and fight out of the love which they bear to the cause.

Certainly diplomatic dexterity can, and should, postpone the conflict for a time, and at times disentangle the difficulties. Certainly all those in authority must and will be fully conscious of their enormous responsibility in the grave hour of decision. They must make it clear to their own minds that the gigantic conflagration, once started, cannot be so easily or so quickly extinguished.

As, however, lightning is an adjustment of the tension between two differently charged strata of the atmosphere, so the sword will always be and remain until the end of the world the decisive factor.

Therefore every one, to whom his country is dear, and who believes in a great future for

our nation, must joyfully do his part in the task of seeing that the old military spirit of our fathers is not lost, and that it is not weakened by...thought. For the sword alone is not decisive, but the arm steeled in exercise which bears the sword.

Each of us must keep himself fit for arms and also prepared in his mind for the great solemn hour when the Emperor calls us to the standard - the hour when we no longer belong to ourselves, but to the Fatherland with all the forces of our mind and our body; for all these faculties must be brought to the highest exertion, to that "will to victory" which has never been without success in history.

...Our country is obliged more than any other country to place all its confidence in its good weapons. Set in the centre of Europe, it is badly protected by its unfavourable geographic frontiers, and is regarded by many nations without affection.

Upon the German Empire, therefore, is imposed more emphatically than upon any other peoples of the earth the sacred duty of watching carefully that its army and its navy be always prepared to, meet any attack from the outside. It is only by reliance upon our brave sword that we shall be able to maintain that place in the sun which belongs to us, and which the world does not seem very willing to accord us.

[*The author then describes a regimental manoeuvre of the guards on the field at Doeberitz:*] The steel helmets glitter in the sunshine; in the galloping exercises every individual horseman endeavours to keep on to the man in front, and to keep the right direction - no easy matter when there is dust, and the ground is rough.

Many a one stumbles, and away past him gallops the company of riders. What does it matter! When you plane wood, shavings must fall. And there the call resounds over the field, clear and quivering amid the uproar of the galloping mass, "Front!"

The reins whirl round, and as if by a stroke of magic, the line is formed again, with a front of five impetuous squadrons of the guards, and then comes the signal, "Charge!"

Then the last ounce is taken out of the horses, and with bodies strained forward and with lances in rest with a "hurrah" we ride to the attack. For any one who has taken part in such attacks, there is nothing fairer in the world!

And yet to the true horseman there is one thing which appears more beautiful: if all that were the same, but if only at the end of the rapid charge the enemy were to ride out against us, and the struggle for which we have been drilled and trained, the struggle for life and death, were to begin.

How often during such attacks have I heard the yearning call of a comrade riding behind: "if that were only the real thing!" All who are true soldiers must know and feel: "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*" [Glad and glorious [or sweet and fitting] it is to die for one's country].