

**MEMOIRS OF BERTHA VON  
SUTTNER  
THE RECORDS OF AN EVENTFUL LIFE  
VOLUME II**

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**PART SEVEN**  
**[CONTINUED]**

## XL FROM HARMANNSDORF AND FROM CHICAGO

Slow increase · Far-reaching endeavors from our quiet corner · Childlessness · With  
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So now there existed in the capital of Germany a Peace Society, about which as a center branch societies would presumably group themselves in all the larger German cities. The proposed task of forming a widespread public opinion was, therefore, well underway. I saw with delight, in my imagination, an undeviating development of the movement. I clearly recognized, however, that the beginnings were comparatively insignificant. What were our two or three thousand organized members compared to the thousand five hundred millions that populate the earth? And how puny, not only in numbers but also in power and reputation, compared to the representatives and supporters of the old system! But what is the significance of the first violet-dotted patch of grass compared to the fields, stretching miles and miles, still covered with the snows of March? It signifies that the spring is at hand. What signifies the first gleam of dawn penetrating the mantle of night? It signifies that the sunrise is coming. Thus I accepted the modest results achieved up to that time by the peace idea, and harbored no doubt that the element of spring, the element of light

that abides in it, must come to fulfillment in gradual but uninterrupted and ever swifter progression.

I have no doubt of it either, even at the present day; but I have learned from experience that such movements do not take place in so straight a line and in such a regular tempo as I then supposed. It is a zigzag line, now attaining great height and speed, then sinking down again; it apparently vanishes, and then with a new start reaches quite unexpected points. And all direct, methodical (*zielbewusste*) work—to use the tiresome, hackneyed word—is on the one hand hampered, on the other helped, by unanticipated, invisible secondary influences; more often helped than hampered, for, where any innovation is to be introduced, its forces converge from all directions.

Our life was now richly filled. We enjoyed two special blessings which one can hardly think of in combination,—impetuous reaching out into the wide world, and peace in our quiet corner. Full of hopes, expectations, struggles, in flaming enthusiasm or in overwhelming indignation, we set sail into the future; and a sheltered, safe little nest, beautifully pillowed with love and gayety, was ours at that time.

Many expressed their pity for us because we were childless. The blessing of children is, indeed, regarded as the highest happiness; but I have never expressed in these memoirs one single word of regret for this lack, nor have we, either of us, ever complained of it. Possibly, if we had known that good fortune, we should not have been able to comprehend how such a deprivation can be borne without pain; but it is a fact, our childlessness never cost us a sigh. I explain this in this way: not only did we find perfect satisfaction in each other, but that need of living for the future which lies at the

basis of the desire to have offspring and to work and provide for them was satisfied in our case by our vocation, which also was striving for the future, and which delighted in something still in its infancy, but growing and flourishing. Besides, we had our literary activity, and it is well known and recognized in popular language that authorship is a kind of paternity (*Autorschaft ist eine Art Vaterschaft*).

And yet how absolutely different my life had shaped itself from what had been anticipated in my childhood and youth! I often had at this time occasion to turn my thoughts back to those days of youth and childhood, and to refresh my recollections of them. My old Aunt Lotti, Elvira's mother, who was now quite alone in the world and had nothing to love except me, had moved into our neighborhood. She lived about an hour's walk from Harmannsdorf, and I used to drive over to see her at least once a week, and chat with her for an hour or two, on old reminiscences for the most part. She took the liveliest interest in my domestic happiness and my labors, and yet we liked best to talk together of times gone by, of the days when Elvira and I played "puff" together.

Aunt Lotti was really the only link that connected me with my early life. My brother was still alive, to be sure, but, except for an exchange of letters once in a great while, we were quite out of touch with each other. So in these recollections I have had nothing to say of him. He was an odd fish, living perfectly aloof from mankind and isolated in a small Dalmatian city, occupying himself with floriculture and chess. His company consisted of a number of cats. Solitary walks along the seashore, the reading of botanical and mineralogical works, were his only passions. I had not seen him since 1872, and up to the time of his death, which occurred a few years ago, we never met again.

In the year of 1893 we did not attend any Peace Congress. Ever since I was carried away by this movement, I have counted the stations of my recollections for the most part by journeys to Peace Congresses, for these always brought visible tokens of the progress of the cause that was so dear to my heart and the possibility of taking an active part in helping it along. They brought me into touch, too, with the old friends, and led to the formation of new friendships; finally, they took us to new places in environments hitherto unknown, and they procured for us that enjoyment which My Own drank in with the greatest avidity,—travel itself. To get into a carriage together, and then to be off and away—it was an indescribable joy!

The Congress this year was held at Chicago, in connection with the exposition which was called the “World’s Fair.” Our means were not sufficient for such a long journey and we gave it up. I intrusted the duty of representing me at this Congress to my friend Malaria, the celebrated painter Frau Olga Wisinger. She had been with us in the Austrian delegation at Rome, and was an enthusiastic adherent of the cause; so the mission was in good hands. The name “Malaria” is only a nickname and does not refer in any way to the great artist’s feverish propensities. This was its origin: at Rome all the participants had to register their names and occupations, that a list of those present might be printed and distributed; so in the Austrian group we read, “Signora Olga Wisinger, Malaria,” for that was the way the Italians had deciphered the word *malerin*, “painter.”

During the World’s Fair, countless congresses were held in Chicago, and one of them was the Congress of Religions. All the great sects of the world had sent their dignitaries to represent them. This was certainly the first time that the promulgators of different



creeds had come together, not to proselyte or to battle with one another, but to bring out the principles that are common to them all. And Christian bishops, Mosaic rabbis, Buddhist and Mohammedan priests, found themselves at one in the principle: God is the father of all; therefore all are brethren. So there was also a peace principle resulting from this Congress of Religions.

The actual Peace Congress which met August 14–19, in the Art Institute, under the Administrative Department of the Columbian Exposition, was presided over by Josiah Quincy, Assistant Secretary of State. Among the participants and speakers was William Jennings Bryan, who in the year 1904 ran as Roosevelt's opponent for the presidency of the United States, and who may perhaps at some future election win the victory.

In this Congress delegates from Africa and China participated. Europeans were only slimly represented. The journey across the great pond, which means for Americans only "a trip," still frightens the inhabitants of our continent. Dr. Adolf Richter went from Germany, Dr. Darby from England, Moneta from Italy, and from Austria—"Malaria." The Americans of course were well represented and by distinguished men,—scholars, judges, statesmen. A soldier even, General Charles H. Howard, gave an address on the International Tribunal. A special church convention joined the movement by referring to the projected petition of the various Christian bodies of the world to the governments in behalf of the Court of Arbitration. This plan was carried out, and the petition, which was signed by about a hundred ecclesiastical dignitaries of all countries, was subsequently laid before all the heads of governments. I was intrusted with the duty of presenting the copy destined for the Emperor of Austria.

## XLI

### VASÍLI VERESHCHÁGIN

Vereshchágín in Vienna · He does the honors at his exhibition · “All Quiet before Plevna” · “Apotheosis of War” · Moltke standing before this picture · A picture of what Vereshchágín himself had seen during the war and painted · Concerning a picture which he could not paint · Further reminiscences of his military life · His Napoleon pictures · A remark of William II regarding them · War and hunting

Now I will tell about Vasíli Vereshchágín. When I learned that the great Russian painter, who was battling with his brush against the same foe that I was fighting with my pen, was staying in Vienna, where he was exhibiting a number of his pictures, I hastened to the city to see those celebrated paintings,—“All Quiet before Plevna,” the “Apotheosis of War,” and all those other variously named indictments of war. Even in the titles that he gave his pictures the artist expressed the bitterness which, next to the pain, animated his brush. The sentinel forgotten in the wilderness of snow, standing there until the drift reaches half to his breast,—that was what Vereshchágín’s genius saw back of the generals’ well-known dispatch, “All quiet before Plevna”; and a pyramid of skulls surrounded by a flock of flapping ravens,—thus he depicted the “Apotheosis of War.”

Even before I had managed to get to the exhibition, I received a note from the painter inviting me to come to the studio on a certain day at ten o’clock in the morning; he would be there and would himself do the honors. We were on hand punctually, My Own and I. Vereshchágín received us at the door. He was of medium height,

and wore a long gray beard; full of animation and fluent in speech (he spoke in French), he had a passionate nature subdued by irony.

“We are colleagues and comrades, gracious lady”; such was his greeting. And then he led us from picture to picture, and related how each came to be painted and what idea was in his mind as he worked. At many of the paintings we could not suppress a cry of horror.

“Perhaps you believe that is exaggerated? No, the reality is much more terrible. I have often been reproached for representing war in its evil, repulsive aspect; as if war had two aspects,—a pleasing, attractive side, and another ugly, repulsive. There is only one kind of war, with only one end and aim: the enemy must suffer as much as possible; must lose as many as possible in killed, wounded, and prisoners; must receive one blow after another until he asks for quarter.”

As we stopped in front of the “Apotheosis of War,” he called our attention to an inscription in small Russian letters near the border of the picture.

“You can’t read that; it is Russian and means, ‘Dedicated to the Conquerors of the Past: the Present and the Future.’ When the picture was on exhibition in Berlin, Moltke stood in front of it. I was by his side, and I translated the words for him; the dedication was a dig at him too.”

Another painting represented a road buried in a thick covering of snow, with here and there hands or feet sticking out of it.

“What in heaven’s name is that?” we cried.

“No work of the imagination. It is actual fact that in winter, both in the last Turko-Russian war and during other campaigns, the road along which the regiments were passing was covered with corpses; one who had not seen it would find it hard to believe. The wheels of the cannons, the tumbrels and other wagons, would crush the wretched men, still living, down into the ruts, where the dead bodies were deliberately left that the road might not be injured; and they were pressed way down under the snow, only the protruding legs and arms showing here and there that the road was a thickly populated graveyard....”

“I understand,” said I, “that you were blamed for depicting the most horrible things that you saw.”

“The most horrible? No. I found much dramatic material from which I absolutely recoiled, because I was utterly unable to put it on the canvas. For instance, I had the following experience: my brother,<sup>u</sup> who was an aide to General Skobelev, was killed during the third assault on Plevna. The spot where he fell was held by the enemy, so I could not rescue his body. Three months later, when Plevna was in our hands, I went to the place and found it covered with bodies,—more correctly, with skeletons; wherever I looked I found skulls grinning at me, and here and there skeletons still wearing shirts and tattered clothes. They seemed to be pointing with their hands somewhere into the distance. Which of these was my brother? I carefully examined the tatters, the configuration of the skulls, the eye sockets, and I couldn’t stand it; the tears streamed from my eyes, and for a long time I could not control my loud sobbing. Nevertheless, I sat down and made a sketch of this place, which reminded me of Dante’s pictures of hell. I wanted to produce such a picture, with my own figure searching among all those skeletons—impossible! Again, a year later, two years later,

when I began on the canvas, the same tears choked me and prevented me from proceeding; and so I have never been able to finish that picture.”

I am warranted in saying that I am repeating Vereshchagin’s own words, for I urged him then and there to incorporate in an article what he had just told me, and send it to me for my monthly periodical. He granted my wish, and in the seventh and eighth issues of *Die Waffen nieder* for 1893 Vereshchagin published these reminiscences and many others besides.

“In order to get a clearer idea of what war is,” continued Vereshchagin, “I made up my mind to be an eyewitness of the whole thing. I participated in an infantry charge on the enemy, and, as it happened, I led the attack. I have been in a cavalry skirmish and victory, and I have been with the marines on board of a torpedo boat in an attack on great ships. On this last occasion I was punished for my curiosity by a severe wound, which almost sent me to kingdom come, to continue my observations there.”

Well, we know to-day that it was indeed his fate to be dispatched into the next world by a Japanese mine. Almost the first news that startled the world at the time of the Russo-Japanese War was that of the sinking of the ironclad *Petropavlovsk*, which ran on a mine. Vereshchagin, pencil in hand, was on board, sketching. A shock, a cry of anguish from eight hundred throats, and down into the depths sank ship and crew! Vereshchagin’s intention was to observe and depict the events of the most modern of wars—what would those pictures have turned out to be? Perhaps it would have been as impossible to finish them as it was to reproduce the scene at Plevna. There are horrors which incapacitate the artist’s hand or darken the observer’s mind. The Russo-Japanese War brought the

general madness to a head. Vereshchagin's vibrant artist spirit would perhaps have been the first to become mad if he had ever tried to paint the scenes which have been enacted on barbed wire and in wolf-pits (*trous-de-loup*).

A few years later—let me here complete my personal recollections of Vereshchagin—I met him a second time. He was giving in Vienna an exhibition of his series of Napoleon pictures. It is said that Emperor William II, on seeing one of these paintings, remarked to him: “With these, dear master, you are battling against war more effectually than all the Peace Congresses in the world.”

Nevertheless, I believe that the artist's intention was not in the least to engage in that sort of battle. He wanted to be true. He did not hate war at all; he found in it the excitements of the chase.

“I have many times killed men in battle,”—these are his own words,—“and I can say from experience that the excitement, as well as the feeling of satisfaction and contentment, that comes after killing a man is precisely like the sensation which comes when one has brought down uncommonly large game.”

## XLII

# THE COMMITTEE MEETING AT BRUSSELS AND ITS RESULTS

Committee meeting of the Interparliamentary Union at Brussels · Letter from Senator Trarieux · Address to Gladstone · Address to the French and Italian deputies · Warning as to the duties of the Union · The “inevitable war” between France and Italy · The case of Aigues-Mortes · Settlement through the friends of peace in both countries

It was decided at the Interparliamentary Conference which was held at Bern in the year 1892, that the next one should meet at Christiania; but this intention was frustrated by circumstances. The conflict between Sweden and Norway, which led, twelve years later, to the separation of the two countries, had even then taken such form as to make it clearly inadvisable to select the Norwegian capital as the seat of an international conference.

So the Conference itself fell through. As a substitute for it the members of the bureau, or managing board, of the Interparliamentary Union met at Brussels for a committee meeting. This board had been organized the preceding year at Bern, and consisted of the following members: Dr. Baumbach, member of the Prussian Upper House (represented by Dr. Max Hirsch); Baron von Pirquet, member of the Imperial Parliament (Austria); Don Arturo de Marcoartu, senator (Spain); Trarieux, senator (France); Right Honorable Philip Stanhope, member of the House of Commons (England); Marquis Pandolfi, deputy (Italy); Ullman, president of the Storting (Norway), represented by Frédéric Bajer, deputy (Denmark); Rahusen, deputy (Netherlands); Urechia,

senator (Roumania); Gobat, national councilor, head of the Interparliamentary Bureau (Switzerland).

I got very little information from the newspapers regarding the sessions of this committee. I only knew that Pandolfi wanted to propose the institution of a permanent diplomatic council for the adjustment of national quarrels, and Stanhope the establishment of an international tribunal. So, in order to get more definite information, I wrote to Senator Trarieux and received the following reply:

Senate, Paris, November 3, 1903

Dear Madam:

I was glad to learn from your letter that our Brussels Conference made a good impression in your country, and I thank you sincerely for the personal sympathy that you manifest toward us.

I believe, just as you do, that, although we must regret that we did not meet in a full conference at Christiania, in accordance with the vote at Bern, nevertheless we succeeded in counteracting this disappointment by the important transactions of our bureau.

Although each regular group of the Interparliamentary Union was represented by only one delegate at Brussels, yet we felt strong because of the assurances of confidence which were transmitted to us from thousands of colleagues; and our resolves, if approved, have scarcely less authority than if they had been the result of the votes of our mandators themselves.

Our chief labor was the final determination of the order of business which in the future is to obtain in the deliberations of the Union. I trust they will be accepted by the next Conference.

Above all we endeavored not to step out of the sphere within which we have from the start confined our undertaking. We cherish the conviction that in order to reach our goal we must not dream of being an academy in which all questions can be treated.



We do not desire to be confounded with revolutionary cosmopolitanism; we therefore exclude from our programme everything that might cause the governments to look on us with suspicion. We do not talk of changes in the map of Europe, nor of rectification of boundaries, nor of any attack on the principle of nationality, nor of a solution of those problems of external politics on account of which nations hold themselves ready for war; we take up only the study of those proposals which aim directly at doing away with war and substituting for it the solution of difficulties through a regularly constituted jurisdiction,—that is a ground on which the broad-minded patriots of all countries may meet.

We have not limited ourselves to the preparation of our programme, but have also passed several resolutions, the importance of which you must have recognized if they came to your knowledge.

Thus we voted to send to Mr. Gladstone a congratulatory address regarding the words which he uttered in the English House of Commons on the proposed court of arbitration; moreover, we have sent a petition to our colleagues of the regular groups in the French and Italian parliaments, urging them most strongly to work with all their energies for a *rapprochement* of their two great countries, which now are unfortunately kept apart through imaginary antagonism.

I am sending you, gracious lady, both of these documents, which, on account of the ideas expressed in them, deserved to be made publicly known throughout the whole world. They are only words, to be sure, but words which exert an influence, because they correspond to the highest endeavors of mankind and contain nothing that arouses criticism even from the most timid of the practical-minded. He who contemns them makes a mistake; contempt and skepticism are out of place when it is a question of penetrating into the secret thoughts of nations, of finding the way to their hearts, and of bringing new truths before the minds of rulers.

Kindly remember me to Baron Suttner, and accept, gracious lady, my most respectful homage.

L. Trarieux, Senator

Enclosed were copies of the addresses sent by the Bureau of the Interparliamentary Union to Gladstone and the French and Italian

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