

**A POLITICAL
PILGRIM
IN EUROPE**

BY
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Table of Contents

A POLITICAL PILGRIM IN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL, JANUARY, 1919

CHAPTER II THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL (continued)

CHAPTER III THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL (concluded)

CHAPTER IV THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS CONFERENCE (MARCH 1919)

CHAPTER V THE CONFERENCE OF WOMEN AT ZURICH (JUNE, 1919)

CHAPTER VI THE INTERNATIONAL AT LUCERNE (JULY, 1919)

CHAPTER VII DYING AUSTRIA (AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1919)

CHAPTER VIII AFTER ONE YEAR

CHAPTER IX MORE ABOUT RUSSIA

CHAPTER X FROM RUSSIA BY SWEDEN AND GERMANY

CHAPTER XI CONCERNING THE JEWS

CHAPTER XII GEORGIA OF THE CAUCASUS

CHAPTER XIII MORE ABOUT GEORGIA

CHAPTER XIV HOME THROUGH THE BALKANS

CHAPTER XV THE DISTRESSFUL COUNTRY

CHAPTER XVI MORE ABOUT IRELAND
CONCLUSION

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Photograph by S. A. Chandler & Co.

To
MY NOBLE AND HEROIC MOTHER

INTRODUCTION

In these days everybody is writing his memories. Disappointed politicians decline to be forgotten. Successful and unsuccessful generals refuse to be neglected. People of all sorts and conditions insist on being heard. The most intimate affairs of a life are laid bare in order to arrest public attention. Intolerable to most is the fear that the world will go past him. Nobody will willingly let himself die. This is the conclusion to which one is driven by the publication during the last two years of a vast mass of autobiography.

I am writing my own memoirs—two years of them. It never would have occurred to me unaided that they could be of the slightest interest to anybody. Friends have listened to my stories with interest, and public meetings on several occasions have, by their silence and attention during the telling, shown a certain pleasure in their recital; but only the insistence of a valued few has induced me to put some of them into a book.

These are not the most interesting experiences of my life. The four years of the war could reveal much more, and better, if it were possible to write about those times. I doubt if I could—fully. The big experiences of life are seldom even spoken about, much less put down in black and white. Things happened during the war which are as sacred as the birth of a child or the death of a lover.

The twelve years of agitation for woman suffrage, during which time I addressed more than two hundred public meetings a year in as many different towns, were packed full of incident, grave and

gay, which a little quiet thought might dig out of the recesses of the mind. They were gallant days, full of fine friendships.

But these stories of my wanderings in Europe since the Armistice, with no other purpose in view than to do what one person might do, or at least attempt, to restore good feeling between the nations and the normal course of life as quickly as possible, will interest chiefly those who understood, and those honest folk who wondered at, the position which a few of us adopted during the war.

Those who have been brought up to believe, as I was, that war is alien to the spirit and teaching of Christianity, will scarcely blame me for taking that teaching literally. I believed with all the intensity of conviction that evil could not be wholly destroyed by evil. The application of this belief to war was clear: Militarism could not be destroyed by militarism even though the princes of this world declared that it could.

I had read enough history to prove to myself the mad folly of wars. All of which never clouded my apprehension of the fact that war may be an evil and yet, by reason of vicious policies and pledges over a number of years, become the lesser evil of two wrongs in the eyes of many wise and good men and women. To choose between the evil and the good is simple. To decide which of two evil things is the lesser evil is anything but simple. I believed myself to be intensely right. This never meant that the other person was necessarily wrong. I never tried to influence by so much as a hair's breadth the judgment of the young man called upon to fight. What he did was his business, not mine. If pure-motived, he was entirely honourable whether he chose prison or the front.

I believed from the first hour that the overwhelming majority of those who enlisted for the war and of those who supported the war did so from the best of motives, and from the same idealism which made it impossible for me to believe in its good issue. It was all a matter of method. The young men went to fight for the thing which I believed could not come by fighting. But as a woman, who could not be called upon to go into the trenches, it was peculiarly my business to seek to end the war as soon as possible for the sake of the gallant lads who had no choice consistent with their sense of duty.

During the last year of the war, after Trotsky had proclaimed the terms of a just peace at Brest-Litovsk, after the German Reichstag had embodied the same terms in a resolution passed by an overwhelming majority of its members, after President Wilson in his wonderful speeches and Mr. Lloyd George in his masterly phrases had given the world to understand that these objects were theirs also—self-determination and the rights of small nations, universal disarmament, and the League of Nations for the preservation of peace—I toured the country from Land's End to John o' Groats making speeches in favour of a just and lasting peace by negotiation. A moderate estimate places the number of people I spoke to on this topic at not less than 150,000.

I have re-read those speeches, widely reported in the local Press. I can find no word that I would alter, no principle which I would retract, no position stated from which I would withdraw.

In them I gave my reasons for fearing the effect upon Europe and the world of the policy of the knock-out blow. Every one of those prophecies has come true. They are becoming more dismally true every day.

I made it clear that a negotiated peace might not be successful. It might be proved that the peace honourable to all concerned, which was to justify to the immortal spirits of our dead the sacrifice they had made, and make their dreams come true, was not possible by conference. Very well. The loss of young life was so appalling that it ought to be attempted.

I gave the utmost credit for sincerity and honesty to those who differed from me in their views. I paid my full debt of sincere praise to those who fought and died for the right.

No; there is nothing in those speeches to be regretted. And I do not regret them.

I am still profoundly convinced that the war went on two years too long, and two years more than were necessary. Time will prove me right or wrong. I am content to wait.

But I cannot wait, and no patriot in this country can afford to wait, for the *Peace* to come right. He must begin to make it come right. The imperialists of Europe are poisoning the world. Into the pit which they are digging for one another they are destined to fall themselves, dragging the innocent with them. Russia, Germany, France, England, America—all will go the same way to ruin unless the great awakening comes soon, and men learn that the bonds which unite nations are indissoluble, or are cut by them at their own peril.

It is needful that all should become, if not pilgrims, priests and prophets of peace and good will. It is vital to do so. Communism cannot save mankind if it be imbued, as so far it has been, with the old bad spirit of hate. Capitalism is failing before our eyes. Militarism has failed.

A new conception must be born, or an old vision reborn in the minds and hearts of men. The everlastingness of Love! The indestructibility of Faith! The eternity of Hope!

“Many waters cannot quench Love,
Neither can the floods drown it;
Who shall slay or snare the white dove
Faith, whose very dreams crown it?
Gird it round with Grace and Peace
Deep, warm and pure and soft as sweet sleep.
Many waters cannot quench Love,
Neither can the floods drown it.”

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A POLITICAL PILGRIM IN EUROPE

CHAPTER I

THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL, JANUARY, 1919

“How infinitely little is the best that we can do, and how infinitely important it is that we should do it!”

To begin a new book with an old quotation is bad; but it must be forgiven because it expresses in a phrase the sentiment upon which the whole of my public life has been built, and it explains in a sentence the object and purpose of those wanderings in many lands of my colleagues and myself about which I have engaged to write.

Nothing less than a clear understanding on the part of the critical observer that they held very strongly the belief, old-fashioned it may be, that “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings” is strength ordained, can save from the charge of madness or of folly the plunge of twelve members of the British Labour Movement, with a bright hope in their hearts, into the maelstrom of Europe and of European politics in January of 1919.

Mr. Arthur Henderson, M.P., Secretary of the National Labour Party, had made strenuous efforts during the later days of the war, and after his return from Russia, to open a door to international understanding and possible reconciliation by trying to obtain from the British Government permission for representatives of British Labour to attend an international Socialist conference at Stockholm, but without success. Time alone will prove the folly of the Government’s refusal. It is sufficient here to remind the reader that a deep and widespread desire for some attempt at an honourable

peace by understanding had existed in Great Britain for nearly two years before the end of the war came. A working women's organization, the Women's Peace Crusade, collected in a few weeks nearly 60,000 signatures to a petition for a negotiated peace; and at 133 public meetings addressed in less than a year by myself, with an average attendance of 1,000 persons, was carried a resolution on similar lines, with fewer than thirty dissentients in all. These were small things in themselves, but symptomatic.

So great was the anguish and concern at the time of the Stockholm proposal that a great Conservative London newspaper headed one of its daily leaders with the words: "Hands off the Socialists!"

Whatever may have been the reason for the Government's refusal to allow British workmen to meet the workmen of other lands at Stockholm, whether on account of French pressure, which was said, or through fear of impairing the *moral* of the soldiers, which was inferred, they withdrew their opposition after the Armistice, and in January of 1919 we left for Berne and the Second International.

I have the most vivid recollection of that first journey to Europe after the war, probably because it *was* the first. I think that every delegate felt the same, a revival of faith, a renewal of hope, a quickening of life. For months before the sudden end of the war, acute sadness and cruel pessimism had possessed us all. Ten, twenty, thirty years, the best that life held, had been devoted by one or the other to the building of a better humanity, and this destruction of everything we had worked for, this swift rattling back to the beginning of things, and to worse than the beginning in some ways, was at times too tragic to be borne. But before the opening of new opportunities pessimism promised to fly and hope to return and stay.

“Isn’t it glorious!” shouted Margaret Bondfield to her colleagues as we shot swiftly into Folkestone station.

“Isn’t what glorious?” I asked, thinking she meant our first view of the sea, stretching black and restless beyond the veil of fine rain which dimmed the windows of the railway carriage.

“Why, that we can travel once more, and that we are flying as fast as we can to see the comrades from whom we have been separated so long.” And she waved her passport gaily. “I wonder if Clara Zetkin will be at the conference; and Balabanova? It is ages since I saw Angelica.”

Margaret’s bright face beamed with happiness, and her brown eyes shone like stars as she gathered up her wraps and bags for transport to the boat. She was like a bird set free from the cruel cage that had held her for four tormenting years. She suggested a warm little bird in her looks and manners. Small and brown, with a rich russet colouring of the cheeks, and quick in her movements, there is nothing in the world she resembles so much as the robin with the red breast.

She was one of the delegates representing the Parliamentary Committee of the Trade Union Congress. I was a representative of the political side of the Movement. Miss Sophie Sanger was invited to accompany us as interpreter, and was possibly the most practically useful woman of the party. She speaks four languages with equal fluency. What Miss Sanger does not know about the world’s laws regulating labour and labour conditions, especially those affecting women, is said not to be worth knowing; which probably accounts for the fact that she now enjoys an appointment

of considerable value and importance in the League of Nations Labour Department.

Mr. Henderson did not travel with us. He had gone ahead several days previously to help M. Huysmans with the final arrangements for the Conference. There had been some slight hitch with the Swiss Government, which at that time was tormented with the fear that we were a body of Bolsheviks out to subvert the loyalty of Swiss citizens. It was necessary to reassure President Ador and his associates on this point. Mr. Henderson was the man to do it. Nobody could look at him, the simple strength and solid respectability of him, and think *him* a Bolshevik! In spite of assurances given by him, every delegate was obliged to sign a statement repudiating the Bolsheviks and all their works before he was permitted to enter Switzerland!

Mr. J. H. Thomas was also one of the delegates; but whether he was attending a special conference with Mr. Barnes at the Hôtel Majestic in Paris, or whether he was busy settling a strike I cannot remember—strikes were epidemic at this time. He came to Berne later in the week.

The short passage across the Channel was quiet and uneventful. We sat in our deck-chairs well covered with warm wraps. A grey mist soon hid the land from our view. A slight rain moistened our hair and faces. We could not read for excitement and the blowing of the wind. We sat watching our fellow-passengers' efforts to control their nerves and the busy sailors engaged upon their various tasks.

I do not know why the sentimental confession should be made here, but ever since I was a child chatting to the fishermen on the beach

at Redcar I have felt a peculiar liking for the men of the sea. Perhaps it is an inheritance from a seafaring ancestry. It should be in the blood of every Briton. There is something in the brave, blue eyes of the sailor, his jolly frankness, his courage, his simplicity which goes straight to the heart of one. His unending contact with Nature in all her moods has stamped itself upon his being as plainly and unmistakably as the heated atmosphere of the weaving-shed or the smutty environment of the mine have set their mark upon the workers in these places; but in a pleasanter, more wholesome fashion.

In an hour or so we sighted Boulogne. It was raining hard, and the little French town looked very dreary and very dirty. French, British, and Belgian troops in considerable numbers mingled confusingly, the bearded *poilu* laughingly replying in cockney slang to Tommy's amusing French. Incredible quantities of war material of all sorts met the eye. The railway track which we crossed from boat to train was a swamp. We had waited till our backs were almost broken with fatigue for the examination of our passports in the smoke-room of the steamer. At that time the element of common sense had not entered in the faintest degree into the organization of this business. Several hundreds of people, packed like sardines in a tin, waited their turn in the crowded ship's corridor, and as the war had spoilt everybody's temper and ruined most people's manners, elbows were freely used to jostle out of their rightful places in the queue the timid and the polite.

A similar rushing, pushing, squeezing, tearing of clothes, wounding of ankles with the sharp edges of boxes, which the owners were too mean to give to the porter or too faithless to trust to him, occurred in the *douane*. At this time every box was opened and its contents carefully examined. The fatigue was immense.

Women fainted and children screamed. Men swore loudly, unashamed. Unperturbed, the blue-uniformed officials pursued their avocation.

Once again an examination of passports, this time by French officials, and again a swaying mass of people in front of the narrow, wooden door, and a hideous scrimmage to enter every time the little French soldier opened it to admit the two or three persons who were permitted to go through at once!

The delegates lost one another in the general confusion. We made a bee-line for the refreshment room as soon as we got through our business, hats awry, hair blown, cheeks flushed with hot air and suppressed fury. Some had lost their umbrellas in the scramble. One missed a good overcoat which he afterwards found. A moderate recovery of spirits and temper followed the appearance on the scene of hot coffee and flaky rolls, the good-natured waitresses smiling a coquettish welcome as we took our seats at the little square tables. Another wave of feeling threatened to overwhelm us when the bill was presented, but this we conquered, and paid up like lords! After all, there were a *few* food profiteers in England, and it was a little early to complain!

Our indefatigable secretary and comrade, Jim Middleton, had engaged seats for us in the Paris train which left Boulogne two hours after our landing. "Jim," as he is affectionately and familiarly called by his many friends in the Movement, is one of the rarest souls in the British Labour Party. When the history of the Party comes to be written his name will figure in it very importantly if there is any sense of right and proportion in the historian. What the Labour Party owes already to his selfless and unremitting devotion to the work of its organization can never

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