

How I Wrote "Lay Down Your Arms"

BY BARONESS BERTHA VON SUTTNER

[Last December, the writer of this article was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1905, and what most contributed to secure this high honor was the authorship of that remarkable work, "Lay Down Your Arms," which has been described by M. Frederic Passy, the first laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize, as enjoying "the rare merit and great good fortune of popularizing a horror of the useless and evil slaughter occasioned by war." Oddly enough, this indefatigable peace advocate is the descendant of a distinguished Austrian military family, her father being the late Count Franz von Kinsky, Field-Marshal.—EDITOR.]

I T was toward the end of the year 1880, when I had already reached a mature age and was in the midst of zealous studies in science, philosophy and history, that the idea dawned on me and soon became a deep-set conviction, that war was an institution handed down to us by the barbarians, and to be removed by civilization. At this same moment I learned by accident that a society existed in England based on this same idea and aiming to influence public opinion in favor of the creation of a court of arbitration. So I hastened to write to this "Peace and Arbitration Association" and asked for information. The now venerable Hodgson Pratt, who is the founder and president of that organization, forthwith sent me the bylaws and publications of the society, and thenceforth kept up an active correspondence with me. Thus it was that I learned all that had been done and all that remained to be done in this important field of work.

The more I looked into the question the more I became absorbed by it and the more eager I was to do what little I could to advance the cause of peace. As I had had some experience in authorship, I felt that it was in the department of literature that I could do the most good. My idea was, at first, to write a little story in which I would describe a young woman who had lost her beloved husband on the battlefield, and who then, as it had happened to me, suddenly awoke to the condemnation of war. In my own case, however, my convictions were based only on theories, whereas my heroine was to be converted thru dire experience.

While I was engaged in gathering materials for my little tale, so much accumulated on my hands and my mind was so teeming with my subject, that from a

novelette my plan grew into a two-volume novel. Not satisfied with superficial information, I now began to consult recognized authorities, to study the campaigns of 1859, 1864, 1866 and 1870-71, to read the memoirs of different generals, to examine the reports of army surgeons and the Red Cross Society, to rummage in libraries and archives, among the diplomatic dispatches exchanged during those periods and among the orders given the various armies. Provided with this data, I set to work on the historical scaffolding of my book and the development of my plot, whose foundation was, of course, the ardent condemnation of war; and when I could write on the last page of my manuscript "The End," and put at the head of the first page, "Lay Down Your Arms," I felt that now I really was in a position to do something for the cause so near my heart. I was armed!

Full of confidence, I sent my manuscript to the Stuttgart editor who had always heretofore accepted what I offered him and who had recently asked me for a fresh one. But it was promptly returned to me with this message: "We regret it, but this novel we cannot use." So I tried other editors, but all declined it with the remark: "This does not interest our public," or "It would offend many of our readers," or "It is impossible to publish this in the present military state of affairs." Such were the opinions of the leading editors of German periodicals.

I next turned toward the publishers, and first sent the manuscript to my habitual publisher, Pierson, of Dresden. He kept it a long time and then advised me to change the title, which he found too aggressive, and to submit the manuscript to a competent public man for revi-

sion, who would suppress or modify the passages which could give offense in military and political circles. This I, of course, utterly refused to permit. The title of the book expressed clearly the purpose I had in writing it, and told the reader, without any subterfuge, just what he was to expect between the covers, while the passages which it was proposed to cut out because they would excite disapproval in certain quarters were the very essence of the book, what gave it its *raison d'être*. So I would consent to no change, either in title or text.

As I afterward took part in the peace movement, it has been thought in some quarters that I wrote this book as a consequence of that movement. But the facts are exactly the contrary. My book made me a peace advocate, but it did not spring from my participation in that reform. This is how it happened.

In the spring of 1891, about fifteen months after the publication of "Lay Down Your Arms," I and my husband were stopping in Venice. One afternoon somebody knocked at the door, and the servant being absent, my husband himself opened it. An elderly, well dressed gentleman was standing on the landing.

"Does the Baroness von Suttner live here?" he asked.

"Yes; she is my wife," was the answer.

"What! you are the husband of Madame von Suttner—Bertha von Suttner?"

"I certainly am."

"You are not dead, then?"

"With your permission, I am still living."

"But were you not shot in Paris?"

"It seems not."

In the meantime I stepped forward and led our guest into the drawing room. when he presented himself to us and told us the object of his visit. We soon learned that we had before us Mr. Felix Moscheles, son of the celebrated composer, Ignaz Moscheles, and godson of Felix Mendelssohn, he himself a painter, an earnest peace advocate and vice president of the London Peace and Arbitration Association. He told us he had been ill during a pleasure trip in Egypt, and his wife, to amuse him, had given him a copy of "Lay Down Your Arms" to read. He began the book rather against his will, he went on to tell us, for he does

not care for fiction. But when he saw the nature of the volume he hurried thru to the end with feverish interest, because here were all his own views against war condensed in a living and possible story. "I must make the acquaintance of the author of this volume," he then and there said, and forthwith decided to journey home via Vienna. He had intended simply to pass thru Venice, but while telling one of his friends why he was going to Vienna, learned that the person sought for was at that moment in Venice, and that she even lived in the Pleazzo Dario, just opposite his lodgings. So he started out immediately to make the personal acquaintance of the unhappy widow, the expounder of all his cherished ideas; when lo! her lawful husband himself opens the door. Thus the widowhood was found to be fiction, while the communion of ideas is still a living thing; and, during that first hour was formed a friendship between us three which has lasted without a cloud from that time to this, and whose first act, on the evening of that same day, was the laying the foundations of a new work which was to have an important influence on the peace movement.

At that time there lived in Venice, where he kept open house, Marquis Beniamino Pandolfi and his wife, who had been a friend of my childhood. I knew that Pandolfi, who was a member of the Italian Parliament, was a supporter of peace ideas, and as he was giving a reception that evening, I suggested to Mr. Moscheles that he seize the occasion to speak with him about the movement in England, and that he urge him to secure, among his colleagues in the Italian Parliament, adherents to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which was at that time a very small body. It was especially important to strengthen this organization at that moment, for in November of that year the Union was to meet at Rome. This association had been founded in 1888 by Wm. R. Cremer, M. P., of London, and Frederic Passy, of Paris, then member of the Chamber of Deputies, and it was at the French capital, during the International Exhibition of 1889, that the first Inter-Parliamentary Conference was held, France and England alone being represented. The second meeting

was held in London, with a few more parliaments represented, and now the third meeting was to take place in Rome.

The result of the advent of Mr. Felix Moscheles at the Palazzo Bianca Capello, Pandolfi's home, was that, while the elegant society of Venice and its gay youth were dancing and eating in the big dining room, a long conversation took place in the host's study, in which the Marquis, Mr. Moscheles and we two participated.

The upshot of it all was that not only did Pandolfi promise to aid in the organization of the approaching conference, but invitations and circulars were prepared on the spot looking to the foundation in Venice of a peace society. The plan succeeded, and some of the most prominent men of the town came into the movement. Shortly after this social meeting at Pandolfi's he returned to Rome, Mr. Moscheles to London and my husband and myself to Vienna.

In the course of a few weeks I learned from Pandolfi that he was having marked success in securing collaboration in Rome, and at the same time we began working up a favorable sentiment in Vienna. We talked to our Parliament friends of the newly established peace society of Venice and of the coming meeting in Rome, and in the end I had the great pleasure of being instrumental in bringing about the formation of a Parliamentary group at the Austrian capital. I addressed myself personally or by letter to one after another of the members of Parliament, sent them the Pandolfi circulars, and used every possible means to secure an Aus-

trian delegation for the Rome conference. In this ungrateful preliminary labor I was especially aided by two Deputies, Barons Pisquet and Kübek. I still have in my possession letters from different prominent members of that time which dwell on the inopportuneness of the proposal and the practical difficulties in the way of its realization. But we succeeded, nevertheless, in getting a delegation sent to Rome, with Dr. Russ at its head. This was an important step. Another was to follow.

It was a fancy of mine that, at the same time with the holding of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference, it would be a good idea if an international congress of peace societies were also assembled in the Eternal City. But as there was no such society in Vienna, I seemed thus called upon to create one there. In undertakings born to succeed, there generally lies an ingenuous ignorance of the risks, an incomprehension of the obstacles and a happy unconsciousness of one's own arrogance. So on September 1,

1891, I sent out a call for the founding of an Austrian peace society, and great was my astonishment, two days later, to see it given a conspicuous place on the first page of a leading Vienna daily, the *New Free Press*, with these words from the editor accompanying it: "On this question no authority is higher than that of the author of 'Lay Down Your Arms.'" Then followed this editorial comment on the idea set forth in the call:

"Because of the new instruments of destruction and the increased armed forces, war has been changed into a thing that ought to



Baroness von Suttner.

be described by another name. Because of the continuous development in warlike preparations, armies are now quite different from what they were when we last saw them brought face to face. Let me illustrate my meaning. If you keep on warming a bath till the water boils, so that the person who steps, rather falls, into the tub is scalded to death, can you still call this a bath?"

Since the above lines were written, fifteen years ago, things have gone from bad to worse, and this will go on. The great book of the late Jean de Bloch, "The Future of War," proves this. From all sides pour in the accusations against the wholesale murder of modern warfare. The god of war, who has silently grown into a race-devouring Moloch, has been brought before the awakened conscience of the world. He is summoned to defend himself, or, if he fails to do so, to accept the death warrant which sooner or later must be his lot.

The response to my call astonished me much more than its prompt publication in the Vienna daily. Immediately hundreds of enthusiastic letters came pouring in upon me from all classes of society, and prominent persons offered to aid in founding the proposed organization. So thus was the Austrian Peace Society established, of which I am still president. I was sent as its delegate to the Rome Peace Congress, and there, in the Capitol, I made my first public appearance in the peace movement. So I repeat, that the writing of the novel, "Lay Down Your

Arms," cannot be regarded as a result of my public career, but, on the contrary, my career sprang from the novel.

All this is now very far off. Then, novels and the forming of peace societies were important factors toward the advancement of the movement. But today it has reached such a point and is associated with such high and decisive political problems, that the acts of the individual, in letters or societies, have been pushed into the background. It has become the question of the hour, and neither the energy of its originators nor the pleadings of its followers are now essential to its final triumph.

What we must do now is to develop the existing organizations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Hague Tribunal, etc., and create an international political system that will give a legal basis to universal peace. Practical work toward an ideal end is peculiarly the part of America and Americans. It is quite natural, therefore, that it should be the United States branch of the Inter-Parliamentary Union that has formulated a plan for the accomplishment of this grand result. At the next Conference of The Hague, whose convocation we owe to President Roosevelt, the proposal of the American body and its chairman, Mr. Bartholdt, Member of Congress, will be laid before the world. Then will the peace movement take another grand step forward.

VIENNA, January, 1906.



A Prayer

BY MARY EASTWOOD KNEVELS

LORD, of Thy gifts I ask but one,
That I should never be content.
But climb all day beneath the sun,
And count my every feast a Lent.

To hold success another loss,
To say my failure is a gain,
To bear with pride a heavy cross.
To look on highs and not attain:

To stumble into heaven at last,
Too spent to lay my burden down.
Unconscious that the world is past,
And this new weight I wear, a crown!

WEST ORANGE, N. J.