

## OUR "IGNOBLE, RANCID" POPULAR SONG

**T**HERE WERE some outside nations who looked on while British soldiers were singing "Tipperary" and felt that the emotions of war found an ignoble, or at least an inadequate, expression. It was taking a great cause frivolously. Now an outside nation is wondering how America can be so sunk in pacifist conviction as to elevate such a ditty as "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier!" into a song of nationwide popularity. Of course Mr. Roosevelt, if report be true, will have nothing to do with such "balderdash," and perhaps many who have heard the song have merely classed it with the ephemera of the music-hall. Mr. Sidney Brooks, however, informs the British nation, through the medium of *The Daily Mail* (London), that a friend of his found it sung wherever he traveled in America. He himself declares that "behind the sentiments express in the ditty there is rallied . . . a force of American opinion such as has never yet in any country been devoted to the cause of peace—peace at any price, peace regardless of justice and national dignity and rights." This, he admits, is still a minority opinion. "Most Americans will go far, and even very far, to avoid war," he declares. "But they will not go any lengths." While Mr. Brooks discusses this peace sentiment with some recognition of its worthier aspects, the *London Spectator*, "haunted" by this song's "lilting cacophonies," finds itself as much "afflicted as Mark Twain was by the ticket-collector's lilting jargon which transformed itself into the famous doggerel with the refrain:

Punch, brothers, punch with care,  
Punch in the presence of the passenjare!

Here, for the benefit of those not yet acquainted with it are the lines in question:

I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,  
I brought him up to be my pride and joy,  
Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder,  
To kill some other mother's darling boy?  
The nations ought to arbitrate their quarrels,  
It's time to put the sword and gun away,  
There'd be no war to-day  
If mothers all would say,  
"I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier!"

After this *The Spectator* goes on to add comment and parody:

"There is a terrible, triumphant crash about that last line, 'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier!' With a good tune it must be invincible. But what are we to say of the political faith behind this verse of captivating ugliness? It is surely an appallingly unforeseeing faith, even a mad one. Let us rewrite the verse for her (since we can not escape it):

I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,  
I brought him up to hate all row and fuss,  
But he will put a musket on his shoulder  
If other people try to bully us!  
The nations ought to arbitrate their quarrels,  
It's time to put the sword and gun away,  
But they will rue the day  
If they make mothers say,  
'Well, after all, he's got to be a soldier!'"

As *The Spectator* does not see the "pacifist mother of the United States" saying that, he proceeds to descant upon her and even try another hand at poetic expression:

"She looks on while Americans are murdered and robbed in Mexico, while American women and children are done to death on the high seas, and she says: 'Why add blood to blood? If we do not enrage the tiger further there will still be peace, and

nothing is more blest than peace.' She will not admit that in the affairs of nations even the policeman should do his work. The policeman might shed some blood in bringing the criminal to book! It passes our comprehension that the mothers of 'darling boys' can see what has happened in Belgium and refrain from saying that such things shall never happen in their country if they can inspire their darling boys to be men enough to prevent it. Yet they do seem really to think—but we must rewrite the verse again to represent their feelings quite truthfully:

I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,  
 I brought him up to know that  
     he is free  
 To refuse to put a musket on his  
     shoulder,  
 Or to fight for country, hearth,  
     or home, or me!  
 If the nations will not arbitrate  
     their quarrels,  
 My duty I shall none the less  
     fulfil;  
 Burn and ravish if they will,  
 They'll find me saying still,  
 'I didn't raise my boy to be a  
     soldier!'

"We have not meant to apply our comments specially to the present war. We hope that the United States may be able to keep out of this war, while successfully rendering the service which she owes to humanity. But if pacifism, as enshrined in the popular verse of the moment, prevails, the bitterawakening will be only postponed. It is bound to come some time. Perhaps the blow will come from Germany. Perhaps it will come from Japan. Come it will, if the United States asks for it by a policy of impotence. A well-known rime says:

If I were King of France,  
 Or, better, Pope of Rome,  
 There'd be no fighting men abroad,  
 No weeping maids at home.

"But first you must have the power of the King of France or of the Pope of Rome. You can impose peace; you can not, in this world as we know it, get peace by plaintively begging for it.

"Beside and beyond all this, what sort of a home would that be in which the first thought was how to avoid danger, how to save Bobby's skin, how to be a successful shirker in the battle between right and wrong? Very differently was the ideal home painted by Pope in the verses he left 'after sleeping in the Duke of Argyll's house'—verses which contain the most splendid compliment ever paid by a poet to the good citizen:

Beneath thy roof, Argyll, are bred  
 Such thoughts as teach the brave to lie  
 Stretched out on Honor's noble bed  
 Beneath a nobler roof--the sky.

The people who sing 'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier!' will not understand what we mean, but there are millions of American men and women who will, and whose hearts will burn within them at the thought that any one could believe this ignoble, this rancid song to be the authentic voice of the Union."

# The Literary Digest

for

August 21,

1915