

LADIES COLUMN.

"Lay Down Your Arms."

This book has been so widely read that the following account of an interview with the author the Baroness von Suttner, which has been sent to me from Austria may prove interesting to the readers of the Ladies' Column:—

Baroness Von Suttner.

Amongst the many excellent articles appearing in the "Wallasey News," those contributed to the Ladies' Column, whose destinies are presided over by "Yevrah" and "Madeleine Greenwood" are undoubtedly widely read and with considerable interest. I may, therefore, be permitted to correct a slight error which appeared in this column in the "W. N." of December 16th, in which the subject of this article was described as a "Swedish Woman"; Baroness Suttner is not of Swedish, but of Austrian origin, having been born in Prague in 1843, and is a scion of the Kinsky's, one of the oldest and highest aristocratic families in Austria.

In order to verify this, however, and also as a member of the "Friedensgesellschaft" (Peace Society) here, of which the Baroness is "Praesidentin," to congratulate her ladyship on being awarded the Nobel prize. I recently sought and obtained an interview, and an account of same may perhaps not be uninteresting to your readers.

Baroness von Suttner, the gifted authoress of "Lay Down Your Arms," and numerous other works, is undoubtedly one of the foremost workers and leaders in the Peace movement, which she has made her "life's work."

I never spent a more interesting and delightful hour. The grace and charm of the Baroness, the beautiful serenity with which she evidences her conviction that Peace will one day reign in the world, and is bound to come whether we wish it or not, her friendliness and knowledge of men and things are truly charming.

Taking with me a copy of the "Wallasey News" referred to, I repaired to the Baroness' "Wohnung" (residence) at the appointed hour, and after being duly announced was cordially received by her ladyship—a tall commanding figure, invariably dressed in mourning—who rose from her writing desk as I entered. Drawing up a chair to the "Ofen," she invited me to be seated. The streets were covered with "glatteis," rain having fallen and immediately frozen, and the Baroness pitied the poor horses. "Is that part of your life's programme," I inquired? "Well," she said, "I am in sympathy with all suffering of man or beast, and to reduce same as much as possible is 'everybody's' business."

After thanking her for the interview, I expressed hearty congratulations on the occasion of the new honour that had been bestowed upon her, on behalf of several friends, including the "Diners Union" (a private Liverpool society (chiefly Wallaseyites) to which I have the honour to belong, in whose doings the Baroness evinced a lively interest) and I took the privilege also of including the readers of the "Wallasey News." She shook me warmly by the hand, and desired me to convey her thanks to all well-wishers.

I then read the article from the "Wallasey News," to which she listened attentively, and although the article was short, she seemed extremely pleased, and remarked "It is indeed a very kind and friendly little article." I may here remark that our conversation was carried on entirely in English, the Baroness being a perfect English and French scholar.

I assured her that her most famous work "Lay Down Your Arms," translated into twelve different languages—was well known amongst the best class of English readers, who held her in the highest esteem, and it was chiefly here in Vienna that I heard her abused.

"Have you lost many friends through the Peace movement, and has it caused you any trouble?" I asked.

"Yes, but that does not matter," she replied. "I, like all people who are looking forward, have my ideal before me, and towards that, in spite of everything, I strive. As for those who attack me personally," she said with a smile, "I have only pity, they cannot attack the cause, and consequently attack the person. But where the Peace movement has caused me to have perhaps hundreds of enemies, it has gained me millions of friends and well-wishers. In fact, this is one of the greatest joys to me in the movement, it has brought me into contact with such charming people, good people, not goody-goody," she said with a smile, proving her intimate knowledge of the English language; "great thinkers, noble workers full of enthusiasm for the great ideals to which they are striving. My chief trouble at present," she continued, "is the numerous begging letters from all parts of the world, to which I cannot possibly give to all; in fact, if the Nobel prize had been twice as large, I could easily have disposed of same."

"What does your ladyship think of the movement at present?"

"Well, it is making possible strides, but education is still sadly wanting. As soon as people realise the sin and uselessness of war, and wake up to their own individual responsibility through education, war will cease. There is a 'war party' in every country, whose sense of right is blinded by their military ardour, and they possess means and organisation. The Peace workers have neither means—although Carnegie and others have and are rendering good help—nor have they organisation, although in this latter respect there is marked improvement."

"Do I understand your ladyship is against giving toy soldiers to children?"

"Please do not address me as 'your ladyship,' it is too stiff—here I am certainly 'Frau Baronin,' but I much prefer the simple English mode of address. As to soldier playthings, it is not a great point with me, but still I do not like it, teaching children, even in fun, 'to kill men off'; I think other useful toys might take their place."

"Is 'Lay Down Your Arms' a biography?"

"No, purely fiction; but, of course, founded on fact, the war scenes being taken from authentic documents to which I obtained access."

"What first led your thoughts to the Peace movement, and caused you to make it your life's work?"

"The study of English philosophers, Darwin, Buckle, and Herbert Spencer first set me thinking, and I have since devoted all my energies to the cause because I became so"—here the Baroness was lost for a word—"überzeugt" (convinced) of the importance of this momentous work; undoubtedly the greatest question of the day, which, being unsolved, cripples progress and holds the world back, and one which affects everybody, rich and poor, young and old, directly and indirectly, for the world is even to-day so closely drawn together that no two countries can wage war without affecting all other peoples. Owing to the Russo-Japanese war, for instance, a Scottish manufacturer, according to the papers, has had to close down his works, and thousands of honest people are out of work!"

We next discussed, among other things, her tour through Germany, visits to Paris and America, and her interviews with W. T. Stead, President Loubet, President Roose-

velt, etc. Of the latter, she said:—"Yes, we had a most interesting talk. The President is a Peace man, and so are the American people for Peace; it is a great race. The President told me they wished to be strong enough to defend themselves, if attacked; hence their increased armaments; but he would, in case of trouble, do everything in his power to arrive at an understanding by pacable methods; he will not, however, be frightened by threats of any aggressive action, or allow himself to be bullied."

The Baroness spoke in warm terms of President Loubet, and then went on to speak of the French-English "entente."

"In most quarters quite a mistaken view has been taken of the matter. To Delcasse and Lansdowne has been attributed the honour of bringing about this great movement in the direction of Peace, the entente between England and France. As a matter of fact, these two diplomatists were positively driven to signing the Treaty by the peace workers of England and France."

"What do you think of Volunteers, and the possibility that we may have Conscription in England?"

"The Volunteer movement, where men are trained for 'defence,' is certainly good for the present; when, however, no party aggressive, war ceases. I fear conscription may come, but sincerely trust it will not, and if the Liberals are in power I do not think it will be adopted. It would be a calamity for the world, as it would tend to further increase the terrible burden of armaments everywhere."

I ventured to remark that the experiences of the recent war proved the statements in her book "Die Waffen Nieder" completely. The sturdy Baroness was immediately on the war-path.

"But since my book was written, war has grown even more terrible and horrible. Look at the 'Wahnsinn' (madness) and absolute loss of self-control."

"In former times a battle lasted a day, the 'day was respectively won or lost'; but nowadays a battle lasts a whole week, and the poor human frame and nerve simply cannot stand the terrible strain, day and night, day after day, and consequently insanity is the result, and not only that, a war lasts for years without appreciable or decisive result."

"Granted that one is thoroughly convinced that war is an evil, what can one—without power or authority—do?"

Her answer is best contained in an extract from her book:

"What is most astonishing, according to my way of looking at it, is that men should bring each other into such a state, that men who have seen such a sight (a battlefield) should not sink on their knees and swear a passionate oath to make war on war, that if they are princes they do not lay the sword away, or if they are not in any position of power, they do not from that moment devote their whole action in speech or writing, in thought, teaching, or business to this one end—Lay down your arms."

Before leaving, I begged the Baroness to write a line in my album, to which she readily acquiesced, and wrote the following:

"Der Weltfrieden kommt, aber er kommt Schritt für Schritt."

Words of President Roosevelt at the White House, 17th Sept., 1904, to Bertha v. Suttner.

Vienna, January, 1906.

As I rose to leave, the Baroness handed me a copy of an American magazine, "The Independent," which is devoted to the Peace movement, and contained photos and articles of the leading Peace workers. I promised to read same and return by post.

"Why not bring it," she said, which I only too willingly consented to do.

She again warmly shook me by the hand, thanked me for the visit, and kindly wished me "auf Wiedersehen."

Passing out of the room, a little incident occurred which I shall never forget.

On the table I observed a glass case, containing a beautiful wreath in solid silver, in the centre of which was a silver plate, in the form of a parchment roll, and engraved on same was an extract from her husband's will, in which he urged his wife to bear up bravely, and continue to fight the good fight, or words (in German) to that effect. "That," she said, "has been my constant stay and comforter, and given me courage in the work I have taken up. Read it through. Is it not beautiful?" I read same, and was about to make a remark when I noticed the Baroness was in tears, and without another word I left the room. It was a touching incident.

FRANK S. JOHNSON.

Vienna, January, 1906.

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