

Newspapers and War

By a Member of the British Foreign Office

A REAL disappointment in this war has been the poor showing that our press has made. I speak generally. Of course there are many exceptions. It is all very well to complain of the censorship, but so far as the censorship affects us in England the press has missed the point that what people who are overwhelmed by the imminent facts of life really want is not news but inspiration. The press alone is responsible for the petty spite, the unworthy ridicule, and the idle boastfulness which has been served up on our breakfast tables for five weary months. It does not represent the people of this country, for the commonplace man in the street has springs of nobility which the editors have failed to discover, and the antics of superficial self-satisfaction indulged in by our press bear no relation whatever to the slowly accumulating reserve of determination which characterizes our people. We thought that our enterprise was rather a dashing piece of gallantry at the beginning—and at that time our press, though poor, represented our feelings fairly well; but the press has failed to follow the people into the infinitely

nobler attitude of today, when our hearts are as grey as our skies, and yet as dumbly faithful to the hope of spring.

Perhaps I exaggerate the attitude of our people, but an appeal to them on these lines in the press and on the platform would shake the earth. You cannot move people to accept wounds and death by scrawling the Kaiser's moustache tips over the pages of illustrated and comic papers. Not that inducement is needed at present.

I am more and more coming to feel that the press is the greatest problem which we have to face in years to come. Its claim to voice public opinion is untrue, because it really only succeeds in voicing the upper thoughts of our unguarded moments. The deeper springs of action on which the existence of society depends remain unvoiced and unencouraged.

I speak of course only of the English press. Your American press, so far as I have seen it lately, has been too kind to us for me to dare to criticize it. But I think perhaps you made a mistake at the beginning of the war in translating

our very human actions into terms of theory. We are not fighting for "democracy"—to which an unsatisfactorily miscellaneous number of meanings are apt to be attached. We are fighting—and are fighting—for England—for something which is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. And so I fear your press helped ours to adopt a Pharisaism which is really foreign to the thoughts of our people. Democracy in some of its meanings is indeed implied in what we know of England. But the United States, with all its kindness, should, in the interests of truth, not forget that we are acting among conditions which we have felt all our lives, and that the distance and the aloftness of Americans from European politics forces them to analyze and marshal the issues in a way which—whether flattering or not to our cause—is not really representative of our thoughts and motives. Perhaps the greatest result of this war on your relations with us will be found in the almost ubiquitous work of Americans in Europe—work which has brought them into our lives in personal ways too intimate for expression.