

PEACE THRU WAR AN ANCIENT DELUSION, AS SHOWN FROM ROMAN IMPERIAL MONEY.

BY FREDERIC STANLEY DUNN.

University of Oregon, Eugene.

The Great War in Europe has furnished an amazing abundance of examples in confirmation of Koheleth's mooted dictum "There is no new thing under the sun". For two weary years and over, the world has been startled from time to time by the exploitation of some novelty so-called, only to recognize it later as but another reshaping of pre-existing factors or the lineal descendant of a primeval ancestor. Whether physical or metaphysical, it has usually been found referable to its archetype.

One phase of the present conflict has succeeded in commanding prolonged attention, as if possessing a remarkable, an almost awe-inspiring, freshness,—the contention that the war was precipitated for the peace of Europe and of the world at large. Ever since the outbreak of hostilities, an enormous amount of literature has been published in an effort to justify the appeal to arms, on the ground that universal peace could only be guaranteed thru war. Since it is the assertion of both warring factions, whether or not each in contradiction of the other, the thesis has been treated to a vast deal of notice from press and pulpit and platform.

If one were to search minutely, history, as ordinarily chronicled, might possibly reward the investigator with the discovery of similar premises ostensibly employed by the world-powers of ages past. But confirmation has come, and that too with overwhelming conviction, from an unexpected source.

In turning the pages of Eckhel's and Akerman's several works on Roman coins, rather aimlessly it so happened, yet with the awe and inspiration as of walking thru the galleries of a museum, the writer suddenly became conscious of the frequency of issues commemorating "Perpetual Peace" or "Peace over All the Earth" or "War the Bearer of Peace".

The reiteration of the same monetary theme from generation to generation forcibly brought to mind the futility of so pretentious a slogan, for here were the Romans of the Empire constantly re-essaying the unaccomplished tasks of their predecessors, doing over again, or rather undoing, the work of their fathers. It was evidently a glorious, a much lauded, caption,—but utopian, unquestionably, and often ludicrously bombastic. And here are the annals, which shall be made to tell their own story.

If ever a monarch could make reasonable claim to the rewards of peace, it was Augustus Caesar, the founder of the Roman Empire, altho even he had had no hesitation in publishing the purpose of his early warfare under the avowed pretext of revenge, as his coins and his magnificent temple, both dedicated to Mars Ultor, abundantly attest. But there are also as eloquent testimonials to his efforts peaceward, not the least of which are the beautiful fragments of the great Ara Pacis Augustae and the famed thrice closing of the Janus Arch, as contrasted with but the two closings in all the previous history of Rome. Christianity too has contributed to the Augustan Peace a sacred veneration, in that Christ was born during its tenure.

Yet the dispassionate, sensible Augustus bequeathed to posterity several documents that bear witness to an unbecoming vanity, among them a *denarius*¹ having upon its reverse the device of a hexastyle temple with an altar in its entrance, the inscription reading:

PACI. PERP(etvæ),

"To Eternal Peace".

It may be ventured in defense of such vaunting phrases as this and others to follow, that they may often have been intended as much in the spirit of invocation as of acknowledgment,—in other words, there is a possibility that Augustus may here have been directing a petition to the goddess of Peace to establish an eternal sway, as many a preacher of today has been heard devoutly to pray. But too much is known otherwise of the inordinate vanity of the Romans to refute the popular interpretation, that

(1) Ak. I, 136, 70; Ek. VI, 92; Stev. 594.

Caesar Augustus was boastfully claiming the acquisition of Perpetual Peace, as if Actium was to be the trophy-point in the world's history,—no more wars to drench the earth.

But how fitful in her periods Peace could be in those days! Augustus was no nearer a perpetual holding of Peace, under conditions as then prevailed, than many another monarch, whether philanthropist or despot, of later and even latter days. The gates of Janus were still open when the great organizer breathed his last,—Tiberius was recalled from the conduct of the Germanic War to be at the bedside of the dying Emperor.

The fact that the next mentioned closing of the Janus was in the reign of Augustus's great-grandson, the fifth of the Emperors, is proof sufficient that, during all the meanwhile, "Pax Perpetua" was a forgotten euphemism.

But there is great probability that the Perpetual Peace of Augustus connoted only the final cessation of civil war, tho other wars might go on interminably. In that case, to be sure, a century's lease must be granted the elusive goddess,—from Actium in 31 B. C. to the death of Nero in 68 A. D.,—just ninety-nine years. Even so, the dream of the first Augustus saw its dissipation in the rebellions under the last of his descendants to wear the purple.

At any rate, it was the recurrence of civil war that occasioned the next flagrant fiction in the name of Peace. It was during the crash of civil discord consequent upon the suicide of Nero, that Marcus Salvius Otho, Emperor for eighty days, had the effrontery to emblazon his gold and silver coins² with the inscription:—

PAX. ORBIS. TERRARVM,

"Peace over All the Earth". The interpretation was enhanced by the device, a female figure carrying in her right hand Mercury's wand of commercial prosperity and in her left an olive branch.

Perhaps Otho's proclamation was merely proleptic, a statement of his political platform, as it were, for his armies were three times victorious before they succumbed to final defeat at Bedriacum. Nevertheless, his regime was at no time secure and other armies of other insurgents were yet in the field to be reckoned with. The inscription can only be pronounced a loud, arrant boast and consonant with the reputation of Otho as a bravado and Nero's former peer.

Not many months later, Vespasian, who really did establish a stable government after two years of general disquietude, permitted the Senate to authorize brass coins³ with the same monetary inscription, "Peace over All the Earth", and himself issued gold and silver money⁴ with the slightly varying phrase:—

PACI. ORB(is). TERR(arvm). AVG(vsti).

The bronzes represented the figure of Peace standing beside a shrine; on the Emperor's own coins the device was a bust of Peace wearing a mural crown, both this latter and EPHE in monogram apparently denoting especial honor to the Ephesian Artemis.

These mintages were not merely an act of deliberation to bring into ridiculous contrast the inconsistency of Otho's boast, which must have been fresh in the recollection of the Empire. Vespasian's other administrative and religious acts prove a real sincerity on his part. His fervent belief in Peace was substantiated by the construction of his splendid new Forum, the nucleus of which was the superbly beautiful Temple of Peace. A distorted idea of Peace, however, the Romans certainly had, if in that same Temple of Peace the spoils of Jerusalem were really dedicated, as is the tradition.

Granted that there was peace, i. e. from the Roman standpoint, meaning principally the actual non-engagement of Roman troops in war,—there was yet also the taunt flung out by Flavian money in the face of Parthia and the unconquered races on the Danube and the Rhine, that the Roman Empire was "the Whole World", a challenge sufficient, it would seem, to keep in ferment the hatred of Rome's foes and to counteract any and all efforts toward a universal peace.

(2) Ak. I, 175, 1; Ek. VI, 302; Stev. 614.

(3) Ak. I, 186, 10.

(4) Ak. I, 184, 36; Ek. VI, 334; Stev. 594, 853.

Domitian's *denarius* with the same inscription and device, even to the monogram EPHE was doubtless a replica of the elder Flavian's coin. A caustic remark put in the mouth of a Caledonian hero by a contemporary historian suggests the best available commentary on what peace meant in the days of Domitian. Tacitus represents Galgacus as shouting this bit of irony to his restless hordes:—"They make a desert and call it Peace". But the immeasurable pity of it is, that what was said in the days of the Flavian House will be just as true when the warring nations of to-day shall meet to declare a fictitious Peace,—now, as then, a cruel misnomer when it is the sequence of warfare.

Peace, Augustan Peace, Peace of every kind and description, was one of the most frequent of phrases and figures to appear on Roman Imperial coins. But it was not until another century had rolled away that the goddess was next presented in pretentious guise. It then fell to the lot of a most undeserving monarch, Commodus, Emperor from 180 to 192 A. D., to have repeated and large successes reported by his marshals from the several belligerent regions of the Empire. The strain upon his own egotism was so great and the belief in ultimate Roman supremacy so popularly prevalent, that Commodus regaled his jubilation in eloquent fashion upon the coins, once more appealing to hyperbole. His several fashions were novel and set a new pace in numismatic styles.

Of these perhaps the most amazing, weighed by modern ethical standards, and evidently also the most prized by Commodus himself, to judge from the metal and the dimension, was the gold medallion,⁵ issued in 188, showing the seated figure of Peace with her attributes, the olive branch and the headless spear. But Peace herself was long since a familiar figure,—it was her ascription that must have won the attention of the Roman world as it does us now, for the medal was inscribed:

PACI. AETER(nae),

"To Eternal Peace", the date and various Imperial titles following. And since the unabbreviated formula:—

PACI. AETERNAE

was inscribed on a silver *denarius*⁶ for current use, there is no question that the epithet was intended by Commodus to be accepted as very truth by the world in general.

The assumption of a specious Peace that was to be eternal was given still another phrasing by Commodus on other coins. These were in both silver and brass, thus having still wider circulation, the former⁷ being inscribed with:

SEC(vritas). ORB(is),

accompanied by the date and several titles, with the device of a female figure seated in repose; while the first brass⁸ held a longer abbreviation:

SECVRIT(as). ORB(is).

"The Tranquility of the World" forsooth!—a "free-from-careness" which was certainly ephemeral, if it was in any sense possible where even the Emperor himself was grim cause for anxiety to his people.

But even granting the premise that only the Roman Imperium was constantly connoted under these phrases of "Eternal Peace and Security", irrespective of the warfare that might be contemporaneously waged afar from the center of government itself, the feature that invariably obtrudes itself upon one's consciousness is the brief duration of the "Peace" or "Security" so boastfully claimed. Many a coin of the several series discussed in this paper could scarcely have been issued before its ascription would be completely annulled by the instantaneous outburst of some terrific conflict, internal or foreign. Within four years from the time when Commodus had issued his pompous, if not sacreligious, coins, the cowardly braggart fell in assassination, and the Roman world rushed into a deadly whirlwind of violence and terror. "Everlasting Peace" and "The Security of the World" therein became a bitter travesty. The unattainable once more asserted itself.

(5) Ak. I, 303, 2; Stev. 241, 594.

(6) Ak. I, 307, 49.

(7) Ak. I, 309, 77; Ek. VII, 121; Stev. 725, 6.

(8) Ek. VII, 121; Stev. 725, 6.

In those days of almost incessant warfare, when armed offensive and defensive were as the breath of life, it grew to be an accepted corollary of Peace and her attributes, that war was her vehicle. Under a regime so essentially military, it was an impossibility that any other concept could find a readier recognition. So we find Commodus in 189 inscribing his coins of rarer metal⁹ with:

MAR(ti). PAC(atori),

"To Mars the Pacifier", followed, after the usual manner affected by Commodus on his coins, by the Tribunitial Year and other official titles. The dedicatory factor of the formula was enlarged on first brass¹⁰ to:

MART(i). PACAT(ori).

The god of war, to indicate his pacific purpose, was represented standing, with his armor at his feet.

"Mars Pacator" brings to mind a disheartening thought, that the human race has not in all these centuries learned the caustic lesson of its own undoing. The ever-returning cycle of events in the story of Rome is irrefutable argument that war, as means to an end, is a cruel deception. War does not bring peace,—it did not in the days of Commodus. Peace that follows in the wake of war is no true peace,—it is a supposititious fondling of brazen effrontery which war has foisted upon credulous, suffering mankind as its offspring. "Mars Pacator" is a monster in disguise, a pirate under stolen colors.

The next offender against truth and practicality was Septimius Severus, Emperor from 193 to 211 A. D., a far more worthy sovereign, who, nevertheless, would not have been the thoro Roman he was if he had not indulged both his personal and his patriotic pride. Indefatigable warrior, traversing his wide domain from end to end, magnificent rebuilder of Rome, implicit believer in his own divine appointment, we might expect to find that Severus too was a firm assertor of the efficacy of war as a pacifying force. The devotion manifested by this drastic Imperator in Mars the Producer of Peace was largely due, it is true, to his implication in civil wars, and, in so far, we are reminded of the Peace mintages of Augustus and Vespasian. There is no reason to question that, under such impulse, real jubilation, actual ratification, was expressed on the coins of the realm.

Of two silver issues of Severus, one¹¹ reflects the style of Commodus, but differs in having an unabbreviated nominative formula:

MARS. PACATOR.

Mars was represented thereon scantily clad, tho helmeted, holding an olive branch in his right hand and a spear in his left. The second¹² employs a variant epithet and restores the dative case, thus:

MARTI. PACIFERO,

while ears of corn, as a symbol of peace, are substituted for the olive branch.

Uninterrupted victories over both civil and foreign foes, the climax of which was attained in the punishment of Parthia, induced Severus in 199 to denominate himself upon his gold and silver coins¹³ as:

FVNDATOR. PACIS,

"The Founder of Peace". The Emperor was depicted on the reverse, clad in the toga and veiled and holding out the olive branch of peace. This splendid, albeit bombastic, monetary inscription must have made a great impression upon the Emperor's family and constituents, for the Senate replicated it on third brass,¹⁴ substituting a palm branch for the olive; silver coins¹⁵ were issued for the Empress, Julia Domna, having the same reverse and inscription; while Caracalla in the next reign reproduced it in his own name.¹⁶

(9) Ak. I, 307, 43; Ek. VII, 121.

(10) Ak. I, 321, 30; Ek. VII, 121.

(11) Ak. I, 347, 88; Stev. 540.

(12) Ak. I, 347, 91; Stev. 540.

(13) Ak. I, 344, 45; Ek. VII, 178; Stev. 401, 739.

(14) Ak. I, 363, 2.

(15) Ak. I, 366, 16; Stev. 401.

(16) Ak. I, 376, 22; Stev. 401.

If taken literally, this strikingly ambitious title is a pitiless refutation of all which had heretofore been claimed by his predecessors, for Severus seems herein to assert himself as the first real peace-maker the world had ever known. Peace now for the first time had the foundations laid for uninterrupted reign. So had that each great victor or would-be-victor Rome had known. So will it be throuout all time, where militarism prevails.

But even the foundations of Peace proved too modest a claim,—in commemoration of the downfall of Parthia, gold and silver coins,¹⁷ with the device of the radiated sun as symbol of the East, were struck on which Severus was magnificently styled:

PACATOR: ORBIS.

"Subduer of the World" this would ordinarily be rendered, but the word-root is that of Pax, and the significance is rather that of "Pacifier of the World", "The Giver of Peace to All the Earth". Agreeably to the attitude which Severus unquestionably assumed, it is the inscription of Otho and Vespasian released from the abstract and made forcefully concrete. In "Fundator Pacis" and "Pacator Orbis" may be read the personal element, the man himself, the Emperor Caesar Lucius Septimius Severus Pertinax Augustus Arabicus Adiabenicus Parthicus Maximus. Despite the certainty that a military regime inevitably produces such spirits, it is wofully suggestive of what may be the bequest of absolutism when conferred upon an unbounded ambition and egotism.

There was but one real world power in those days that made any military effort to resist Rome, and, so when Parthia surrendered to Severus, it seemed the settlement once and for all of the world's troubles. This it was that goaded the masterful Emperor to his extravagant titles, which might almost be forgiven him, when we consider the elements of which he was a normal product. It was the brevity of their holding which makes such phrases ridiculous in the face of sober ethics. Parthia soon regained her independence, was soon again on the aggressive, and, rehabilitated as Persia, remained for centuries the sworn opponent of the Roman Imperium. The so-called "Peaces" for which Rome set the example, are but cessations of hostilities. Armistices they might better be termed. And, if one can read history aright and draw lessons from Rome's centuries of experience, the end of the present conflict will be as surely surcharged with irony and fallacy as ever the Pax Orbis Terrarum or Pax Perpetua of a Vespasian or a Septimius Severus.

This last World Peace, reckoned of course in terms of what Peace meant for Rome, continued thru the reign of Severus's despicable son and successor, Caracalla, such that the latter was constrained to imitate his father's style and to issue silver coins with the same devices and inscriptions. Tho without an atom of the personality or the experience to substantiate it, Caracalla was now lauded on his currency as "The Founder of Peace" and "World Pacificator".¹⁸

Some of Commodus's coins of a quarter of a century past were also duplicated by Caracalla, tho with slight variations as here noted:

MARTI. PACATORI.,¹⁹

and:

SECVRIT (as). ORBIS,²⁰

It is somewhat pathetic to find some of the silver coins²¹ of the ill-fated Geta inscribed with this last phrase. The "World Security" of which the young Emperor boasted did not shield him from Caracalla's fratricidal dagger.

While Caracalla was still only an associate in the Imperium with his father, he had several times issued coins on which "World Security" was amplified as "Everlasting Tranquility". In all the metals,²²

SECVRITAS. PERPETVA

was typified under the device of Minerva, holding an inverted spear in her left hand, and resting her right on a shield, the implication being that wis-

(17) Ak. I, 347, 95; Ek. VII, 190; Stev. 593, 739.

(18) Ak. I, 377, 44; Ek. VII, 219; Stev. 593.

(19) Ak. I, 377, 39.

(20) Ak. I, 382, 115.

(21) Ak. I, 397, 53.

(22) Ak. I, 382, 116; Ek. VII, 199, 200; Stev. 726.

dom,—a misguided, narrow wisdom it was,—lay behind the possession of Security. Other coins with the dative formula²³

SECVRITATI. PERPETVAE,

presented the simple allegory of a female figure, doubtless the personification of Security herself, seated before an altar.

Five years of *in*-Security, tho no less insecure than before, passed after the world had rid itself of Caracalla, when the young dreamer Severus Alexander felt called upon to acclaim Peace and War in the same old extravagant phrases. Septimius, his great-uncle, was recalled by gold and silver²⁴ dedicated "*Marti Pacifero*", the device showing Mars with an olive branch in his right hand and a reversed javelin in his left. Caracalla's "*Securitas Perpetua*" also returned to grace first brasses.²⁵

It had been thirty years since Septimius Severus vainly imagined the East forever conquered and the Peace of the World established for all time,—thirty years, an average interval, if the great world struggles be compared,—and now, in the third generation, Severus's youthful relative was called upon once more to decide the issues with Rome's re-created rival. And thus it was, that in 233 A. D., "*Eternal Peace*" was given a new impulse and a new style, on coins of all metals,²⁶—a stole-clad figure, with olive branch raised in her right hand and the *hasta pura* in her left, and inscribed:

PAX. AETERNA. AVG(vsti).

Futile as these concepts were, whether as expressions of hope or the ebullitions of boast, the extravagance of such phrases as were now being published on Rome's coins was too often proved by the immature and violent deaths of the majority of those who had claimed them. Neither "*Perpetual Security*" nor "*Eternal Peace*" were any more talismanic for Alexander Severus, deserving tho he was, than for cowards and despots like Commodus or Caracalla.

And the assassins who might have expected similar fates, like the priest of Minerva in the Grove of Aricia, seemed never to learn by experience, but proceeded with indifference under the identical slogans.

The story, tho by no means ended, is all but told. Two and a half more centuries dragged on, before Rome finally yielded to the inevitable, yet, intermittently, all thru that period of her decline, Rome's currency, under the blaze of some temporary success, would flaunt its boast of "*Eternal Peace*" or "*World Wide Tranquility*" or would proclaim the virtues of "*War the Peace-Maker*".

Some of her Imperial boasters, such as Aurelian or Constantine or Valentinian, were so near to complete world sovereignty as to warrant some degree of truthfulness in their numismatic utterances. None of them, however, was philosopher enough to compare the present with the past and to deduce therefrom the absolute certainty that history was but going in circles. Each, believing himself the favored of all time, presumed himself the realization of all in which his illustrious forebears had failed.

Others, like Valerian or Valens, were cordially ambitious, as much endowed with qualities making toward greatness as had been the most masterful of the conquerors, but were fated to fall early in their careers, doomed not to realize their challenges of "*Perpetual Security*" or "*The Restoration of the World*".

Still other users of magnificent phrasings were only inheritors of Imperial traditions and conventions, mere weaklings, imitators of the bigness they could not themselves attain. Such were Gallienus or Carinus.

Even petty usurpers, claimants of the purple from small angles of the Empire, as Postumus and Carausius, were every whit as grandiloquent on their money, some of them in fact being known only from their money.

The unattainable then, such claims are still unattainable,—for, tho the world is not now under the imperium of Rome, we have not yet broken the shackles of her influence. The causes of our present gigantic struggle are basically Roman. And, until the day of disarmament and the eradication of war shall come, Peace can never righteously avow the glorious attributes of "*Eternal*" or "*Universal*".

(The footnote references in this paper are to Akerman's Catalogue of Roman Coins, volume, page, and number; Eckhel's *Doctrina Numorum Veterum*, volume and page; and Stevenson's Dictionary of Roman Coins, page.)

(23) Ak. I, 382, 117; Ek. VII, 207.

(25) Ak. I, 440, 22.

(24) Ak. I, 433, 27.

(26) Ak. I, 433, 29; Stev. 613.