

## Mary Augusta Ward: England's Effort (1916)

You say that England at the present moment is misunderstood, and even hardly judged in America, and that even those great newspapers of yours that are most friendly to the Allies are often melancholy reading for those with English sympathies. Our mistakes—real and supposed—loom so large. We are thought to be not taking the war seriously—even now. Drunkenness, strikes, difficulties in recruiting the new armies, the losses of the Dardanelles expedition, the failure to save Serbia and Montenegro, tales of luxurious expenditure in the private life of rich and poor, and of waste or incompetence in military administration—these are made much of, even by our friends, who grieve, while our enemies mock. [...] “Tell me,” you say in effect, “what in your belief is the real spirit of your people—of your men in the field and at sea, of your workmen and employers at home, your women, your factory workers, your soldiers’ wives, your women of the richer and educated classes, your landowners and politicians. Are you yet fully awake—yet fully in earnest, in this crisis of England’s fate? [...]”

Yes!—I must answer your questions—to the best of my power. [Britain’s effort] seems to me—it must seem to any one who has seriously attempted to gauge it—amazing, colossal. “What country has ever raised over sixty per cent of its total recruitable strength, for service beyond the seas in a few months?” asks one of our younger historians; and that a country not invaded, protected by the sea, and by a supreme fleet; a country, moreover, without any form of compulsory military service, in which soldiering and the soldier have been rather unpopular than popular, a country in love with peace, and with no intention or expectation of going to war with any one?

For there we come to the root of everything—the *unpreparedness of England*—and what it meant. It meant simply that as a nation we never wished for war with Germany, and, as a nation, we never expected it. [...] Fruitless efforts were made by successive English Governments to limit armaments, to promote arbitration, and extend the scope of the Hague Tribunal. In vain. Germany would have none of them. Year by

year, in a world of peace her battle-navy grew. “For what can it be intended but to attack England?” said the alarmist. But how few of us believed them! Our Tariff Reformers protested against the encroachments of German trade; but, outside a handful of persons who seemed to most of us fanatics, the emphasis lay always on care for our own people, and not on hostility to Germany. Those who warned us passionately that Germany meant to provoke a struggle, that the struggle must come, were very little heeded. [...]

“There was *no* hatred of Germany in this country”—I quote a Cabinet Minister. “Even in those parts of the country which had most reason to feel the trade rivalry of Germany, there was no thought of war, no wish for war!” It came upon England like one of those sudden spates through mountain clefts in spring, that fall with havoc on the plains beneath. After such days of wrestling for European peace as have left their indelible mark upon every member of the English Cabinet which declared war on August 4th, 1914, we fought because we must, because, in Luther’s words, we “could no other.” [...]

At the word “Belgium” on August 4th, practically the whole English nation fell into line. We felt no doubts—we knew what we had to do. But the problem was how to do it. Outside the Navy and the Expeditionary Force, both of them ready to the last gun and button, we had neither men nor equipment equal to the fighting of a Continental war, and we knew it. The fact is more than our justification—it is our glory. If we had meant war, as Germany still hoarsely but more faintly says, week after week, to a world that listens no longer, could any nation of sane men have behaved as we did in the years before the war?—233,000 men on active service—and 263,000 Territorials, against Germany’s millions!—with arsenals and equipment to match. [...]

Then as to munitions: in many ways, as you will perhaps say, and as I agree, a tragic story. If we had possessed last spring the ammunition—both for ourselves and our allies we now possess, the war would have gone differently. Drunkenness, trade-union difficulties, a small—very small—revolutionary element among our work people—all these have made trouble. But the real cause of our shortage lay in the fact that no one, outside Germany, realised till far into the war, what the ammunition needs—the absolutely unprecedented needs—of this struggle were going to be. It was the second Battle of Ypres at the end

of April last year which burnt them into the English mind. We paid for the grim knowledge in thousands of our noblest lives. But since then?

In a later letter I propose to draw some picture in detail of the really marvellous movement which since last July, under the impulse given by Mr. Lloyd George, has covered England with new munition factories and added enormously to the producing power of the old and famous firms, has drawn in an army of women—now reckoned at something over a quarter of a million—and is at this moment not only providing amply for our own armies, but is helping those of the Allies against those final days of settlement with Germany which we believe to be now steadily approaching. American industry and enterprise have helped us substantially in this field of munitions. We are gratefully conscious of it. But England is now fast overtaking her own needs. [...]

And at the foundation of it all—the human and personal effort!—the lives given for England, the blood so generously shed for her, the homes that have sacrificed their all, our “golden lads” from all quarters and classes, whose young bodies lie mingled with an alien dust that “is for ever England,” since they sleep there and hallow it; our mothers who mourn the death or the wreck of the splendid sons they reared; our widowed wives and fatherless children. And this, in a quarrel which only very slowly our people have come to feel as in very deed their own. At first we thought most often and most vividly of Belgium, of the broken treaty, and of France, so wantonly attacked, whose people no English man or woman could ever have looked in the face again, had we forsaken her. Then came the hammer blows that forged our will—Louvain, Aerschot, Rheims, the air-raids on our defenceless towns, the senseless murder of our women and children, the Bryce report, the *Lusitania*, the execution of Edith Cavell—the whole stupefying revelation of the German hatred and greed towards this country, and of the qualities latent in the German character. Now we *know*—that it is they, or we—since they willed it so. And this old, illogical, unready country is only just arriving at its full strength, only just fully conscious of the sternness of its own resolve. [...]

A new Ministry was created—the Ministry of Munitions, and Mr. Lloyd George was placed at its head. The work that Mr. Lloyd George and his Ministry—now employing vast new buildings, and a

staff running into thousands—have done since June, 1915, is nothing less than colossal. Much no doubt had been done earlier for which the new Ministry has perhaps unjustly got the credit, and not all has been smooth sailing since. One hears, of course, criticism and complaints. What vast and effective stir, for a great end, was ever made in the world without them?

Mr. Lloyd George has incurred a certain amount of unpopularity among the working classes, who formerly adored him. In my belief he has incurred it for the country's sake, and those sections of the working class who have smarted under his criticisms most bitterly will forgive him when the time comes. In his passionate determination to *get the thing done*, he has sometimes let his theme—of the national need, and the insignificance of all things else in comparison with it—carry him into a vehemence which the workmen have resented, and which foreign or neutral countries have misunderstood.

He found in his path, which was also the nation's path, three great foes—drunkenness, the old envenomed quarrel between employer and employed, and that deep-rooted industrial conservatism of England, which shows itself on the one hand in the trade-union customs and restrictions of the working class, built up, as they hold, through long years, for the protection of their own standards of life, and, on the other, in the slowness of many of the smaller English employers (I am astonished, however, at the notable exceptions everywhere!) to realise new needs and processes, and to adapt themselves to them. Could any one have made such an omelet without breaking a great many eggs? [...] What the workmen of England did in the first year of the war in her docks and shipyards, history will tell some day. [...]

I, too, have seen that utter fatigue stamped on a certain percentage of faces through the Midlands, or the districts of the Tyne and the Clyde—fatigue which is yet indomitable, which never gives way. How fresh, beside that look, are the faces of the women, for whom workshop life is new! In its presence one forgets all hostile criticism, all talk of strikes and drink, of trade-union difficulties, and the endless worries of the employers.

The English workman is not tractable material—far from it—and he is not imaginative; except in the persons of some of his chosen leaders, he has never seen a ruined French or Flemish village, and he was

slow to realise the bitterness of that silence of the guns on the front, when ammunition runs short, and lives must pay. But he has sent his hundreds of thousands to the fighting line; there are a million and a half of him now working at munitions, and it is he, in a comradeship with the brain workers, the scientific intelligence of the nation, closer than any he has yet known, and lately, with the new and astonishing help of women—it is he, after all, who is “delivering the goods,” [...].

There will be a new wind blowing through England when this war is done. Not only will the scientific intelligence, the general education, and the industrial plant of the nation have gained enormously from this huge impetus of war; but men and women, employers and employed, shaken perforce out of their old grooves, will look at each other surely with new eyes, in a world which has not been steeped for nothing in effort and sacrifice, in common griefs and a common passion of will. [...]

I am soon listening to the report of the works superintendent. [...] “As to the women!”—he throws up his hands—“they’re saving the country. They don’t mind what they do. Hours? They work ten and a half or, with overtime, twelve hours a day, seven days a week. At least, that’s what they’d like to do. The Government are insisting on one Sunday—or two Sundays—a month off. I don’t say they’re not right. But the women resent it. ‘*We’re* not tired!’ they say. And you look at them!—they’re not tired.

“If I go down to the shed and say: ‘Girls!—there’s a bit of work the Government are pushing for—they say they must have—can you get it done?’ Why, they’ll stay and get it done, and then pour out of the works, laughing and singing. I can tell you of a surgical-dressing factory near here, where for nearly a year the women never had a holiday. They simply wouldn’t take one. ‘And what’ll our men at the front do, if we go holiday-making?’

“Last night” (the night of the Zeppelin raid) “the warning came to put out lights. We daren’t send them home. They sat in the dark among the machines, singing, ‘Keep the home fires burning,’ ‘Tipperary,’ and the like. I tell you, it made one a bit choky to hear them. They were thinking of their sweethearts and husbands I’ll be bound!—not of themselves.” [...]

As it is, by the sheer body of work the women have brought in, by the deftness, energy, and enthusiasm they throw into the simpler but quite indispensable processes, thereby setting the unskilled man free for the Army, and the skilled man for work which women cannot do, Great Britain has become possessed of new and vast resources of which she scarcely dreamed a year ago. [...]

Meanwhile, as Mr. Asquith will explain next Tuesday, the expenditure on the war, not only on our own needs but on those of our Allies is colossal—terrifying. The most astonishing Budget of English History, demanding a fourth of his income from every well-to-do citizen, has been brought in since I began to write these letters, and quietly accepted. Five hundred millions sterling (\$2,500,000,000) have been already lent to our Allies. We are spending at the yearly rate of 600,000,000 sterling (\$3,000,000,000) on the Army; 200,000,000 on the Navy as compared with 40,000,000 in 1913; while the Munitions Department is costing about two-thirds as much (400,000,000 sterling) as the rest of the Army, and is employing close upon 2,000,000 workers, one-tenth of them women. The export trade of the country, in spite of submarines and lack of tonnage, is at the moment greater than it was in the corresponding months of 1913. [...]

*The nation is behind the war, and behind the Government*—solidly determined to win this war, and build a new world after it. [...]

Sympathy with France—France, the invaded, the heroic—is easy for America—for us all. She is the great tragic figure of the war—the whole world does her homage. We are not invaded—and so less tragic, less appealing. But we are fighting the fight which is the fight of all freemen everywhere—against the wantonness of military power, against the spirit that tears up treaties and makes peaceful agreement between nations impossible—against a cruelty and barbarism in war which brings our civilisation to shame. We have a right to your sympathy—you who are the heirs of Washington and Lincoln, the trustees of liberty in the New World as we, with France, are in the Old. You are concerned—you must be concerned—in the triumph of the ideals of ordered freedom and humane justice over the ideals of unbridled force and ruthless cruelty, as they have been revealed in this war, to the horror of mankind. The nation that can never, to all time, wash from its hands the guilt of the Belgium crime, the blood of the *Lusitania* vic-

tims, of the massacres of Louvain and Dinant, of Aerschot and Termonde, may some day deserve our pity. To-day it has to be met and conquered by a will stronger than its own, in the interests of civilisation itself. [...]