

SCIENCE

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BIOLOGY AND WAR¹

1. BIOLOGY is not the science which can throw any light on the origin of war, since wars are caused by economic, political and social conditions. Although these conditions are in the last analysis based upon human instincts it does not seem profitable for the present to trace the connection.

It is also outside the speaker's problem to discuss the effects of war. Compared with the misery and anguish, the general loss of life and of liberty, and the economic waste caused by war, the possible hereditary effects on the population, if there are any, are too trivial to be mentioned.

As far as your speaker has been able to see, biology can at present offer a contribution to the problem of war in one direction only, namely to test some of the claims of war enthusiasts who insist that from a biological viewpoint wars are justifiable or even desirable.

2. These war enthusiasts maintain that unless a nation engages occasionally in war it will lose all those virile virtues, especially courage, which are necessary for its survival. We do not need to argue whether the acts committed in a state of homicidal emotion are the real or only manifestations of courage; we may also overlook the manifestations of virility left behind by invading or retreating armies. The assumption that virility or courage (whatever may be meant by these terms) will disappear if not practised in the form of war implies an unproven and apparently false biological assumption, namely, that functions not practised or organs not used will disappear

MSS. intended for publication and books, etc., intended for review should be sent to Professor J. McKeen Cattell, Garrison-on-Hudson, N. Y.

¹ Read at the meeting of Naturalists, December 29, 1916.