



BERTHA VON SUTTNER

AT THE CRADLE OF
WORLD PEACE

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A SMALL BOOK ABOUT A GREAT WOMAN

Exactly 100 years after the opening of the Peace Palace in 1913, a bronze statue of Bertha von Suttner was unveiled in the entrance hall. The first woman in the gallery of honor was welcomed with tremendous applause. Leymah Gbowee, the most recent female recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013, warmly addressed the first woman who has been awarded the Prize. To her, Bertha was the mother of the peace movement, a woman striving for peace, nonviolence, and women's rights, just like herself, out of personal commitment. She has been honored and besmirched, and sometimes even slightly forgotten during the last century, even though the perspective of women on war and peace has proven to be so valuable in terminating conflicts and in reconciliation.

In the Peace Palace, conflicts endangering peace are settled by means of adjudication between countries. Bertha von Suttner was an ardent supporter of this method, and felt that it should be established in a more permanent form. Over the past century, the courts that have been established to this end, the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the International Court of Justice, have developed successfully. And the Peace Palace has become more than just an impressive building. Its splendor, coming from

*Bust of Bertha von Suttner
by Judith Pfaltzer,
28 August 2013*

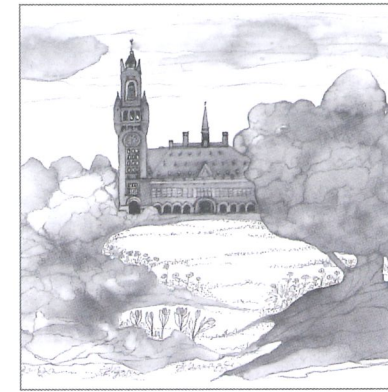
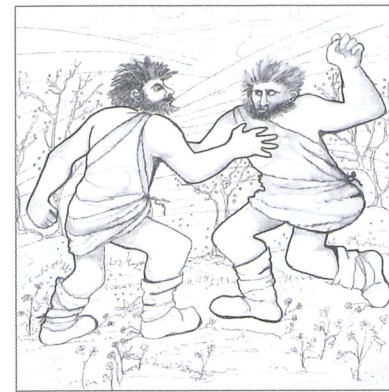
countries from all over the world, as a reflection of their confidence that through law a peaceful world would be achieved, has given rise to great expectations. The Peace Palace became the symbol of an alternative and peaceful way to deal with international disputes, and to prevent warfare.

Bertha von Suttner believed that people and societies were capable of changing. But change is not brought about easily. Bitter experience and hard lessons, gearing towards the desire to ban war, or patient agreements, made to prevent war, do not automatically lead to peace. For today's society and cohesion in the world, peace and justice are complex notions that require ongoing commitment, solidarity, and action. Bertha von Suttner tried to elicit this peace activism a century ago by putting responsibility with both the individual and the government. Governments ought to take care that their citizens can shape and advance themselves by means of education. It has been Bertha's great merit that she has put all kinds of people into motion all over the world. Through the battle for peace and for a Peace Palace her name is inseparably linked to the Palace; and since her bronze image has been given such a prominent place there, it cannot be overlooked by anyone. It reminds us that the world does not simply change into a peaceful world on its own accord. People like Bertha von Suttner have pleaded and fought for it. With the publication of this special illustrated story, the Peace Palace Library wants to give Bertha von Suttner a more well-known face, also outside the Palace walls.





AT THE CRADLE OF WORLD PEACE



A long, long time ago, when the sun still revolved around the earth, people in discord knocked each other's brains out. Was the neighbor's grass greener than your own? Hit him! Did the neighboring country have more fruits and cattle? Go to war, conquer his land! Nowadays we strive to restore and maintain peace. This is no easy task, for we often don't agree with each other.

The Hague is the International City of Peace and Justice. Over the years, many international organizations in the field of peace and justice have been established in The Hague. First of them was the Peace Palace, opening its doors a century ago. What was the reason for building the Peace Palace? The Palace has its origins in the first Peace Conference, held in The Hague in 1899. During this Conference the assembled heads of state decided to create an Arbitration Court, and to build a Peace Palace to house it. Today, also the International Court of Justice of the United Nations has its home in the Peace Palace.

This first Peace Conference did not come out of nowhere. It was organized because citizens and statesmen considered such a meeting to be of vital importance. Throughout the world people had come to realize the necessity of solving conflicts between states in a peaceful manner. To focus energy on peace instead of war was the great innovation of that time! It also meant the start of the peace movement.

Successes have many fathers. But the peace movement has only one mother. Bertha von Suttner was world famous in her days, and the first woman ever to receive a Nobel Peace Prize. When the Peace Palace celebrated its centenary in September 2013, a bust of Bertha von Suttner was unveiled in the gallery of honor. How did Bertha come to stand, so to speak, at the cradle of the peace movement, and thus indirectly at the cradle of The Hague as the International City of Peace and Justice?



Bertha was born in Prague in 1843 as Countess Kinsky. Her father was a general, but he had passed away before Bertha was even born. Her mother unfortunately could not withstand the temptation of gambling and soon squandered the entire family fortune. Bertha however was intelligent and well educated – she spoke German, English, French and Italian fluently. Already at a young age she turned out to be a convinced democrat. She preferred to obtain successes by means of personal merits, rather than by merit of her ancestry. And so she decided to search for a job instead of a husband. A most unusual choice for a young woman of noble descent in the 19th century!

In Vienna she got a position in the household of Baron von Suttner as a governess to his four daughters. As time passed, Bertha fell in love with the older brother of the girls that were entrusted to her care. The feeling was mutual. Arthur von Suttner however was 7 years younger than Bertha. Unacceptable, his parents thought, and Bertha was asked to leave.

It seems that Arthur's mother interfered and brought Bertha in contact with the wealthy Alfred Nobel, who lived in Paris. Then money would soon enough win over love, she thought.

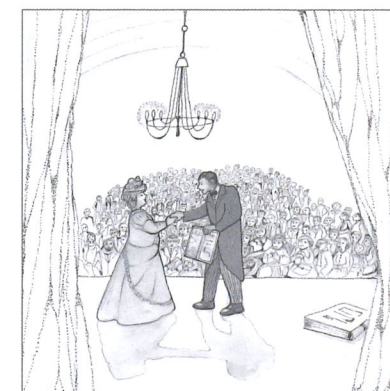
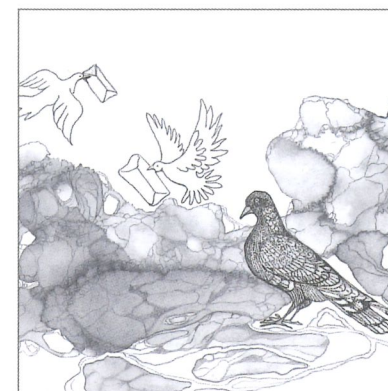
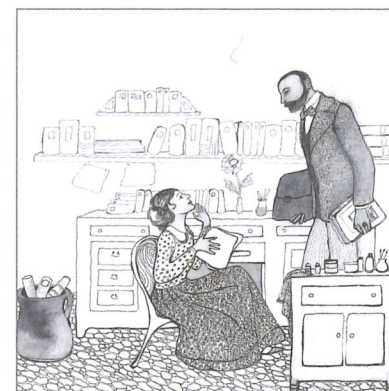
But that is not what happened. After she had worked for Nobel a short period -during which she exchanged many passionate love letters with Arthur- Bertha returned to Vienna in 1876. There she and Arthur got married in secret. As was to be predicted, Arthur was disinherited. Together they fled to the Caucasus and moved in with an old friend of Bertha's mother.

The nine years that followed were years of poverty. Both Bertha and her husband tried to make money by giving language lessons and writing articles for European newspapers. During those years, bloody wars were fought in the Caucasus. Bertha and Arthur reported on them, and in doing so developed their social and political views. The gruesome reality of war that she now got to know from firsthand experience filled Bertha with such an abhorrence that she decided to dedicate the rest of her life to the ideal of peace.



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NOBEL PEACE PRIZE



Bertha von Suttner was from a noble family, but took the decision – unusual for ladies of noble birth – to make her own living. That decision brought her to Paris, as the secretary of the then unknown Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel. He had amassed an enormous fortune from the invention of dynamite. Nobel was smitten with the intelligent and charming Bertha, but she was not seduced by his wealth and knowledge.

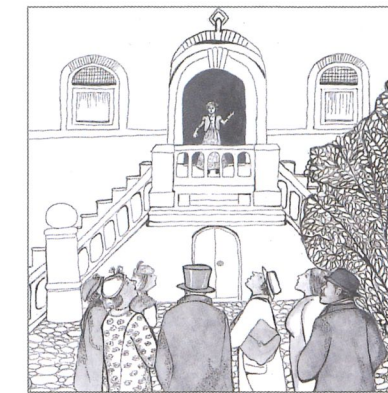
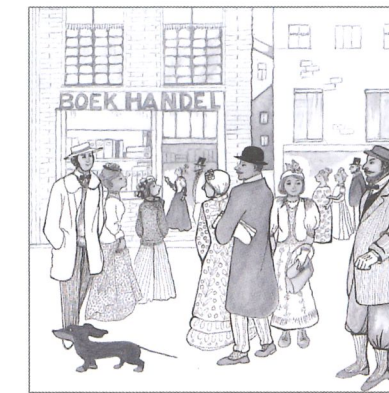
Bertha was and remained in love with Arthur von Suttner, for whom she soon left Paris. The rich inventor never married another woman. For the rest of his life, he maintained a close friendship with his former secretary. Owing to their frequent correspondence, he followed her in her development into an ardent pacifist. When her book “Die Waffen nieder!” (“Lay Down Your Arms!”) came out, Nobel enjoyed from a distance the enormous success it gained her. And not just her book, but also the many speeches and lectures Bertha gave were received with great enthusiasm.

He admired the perseverance and energy with which Bertha founded peace movements and established international connections. Nobel did not only support Bertha morally, but also financially. He funded many of her trips to peace congresses that were now being organized everywhere throughout the western world.

Since he had no children, Nobel wanted to leave his wealth for the benefit of science and literature and established the Nobel prizes in his will. He also wanted to leave something to his much admired Bertha. He therefore instituted the Nobel Peace Prize -because he was convinced that this prize would immediately be awarded to Bertha-, but also because he was horrified by the consequences of his own invention.

However, after Nobels death in 1896, the parliament decided first to award the Peace Prize to four men, before, in 1905, they eventually awarded the prize to the person for which it had been especially intended: Bertha von Suttner.





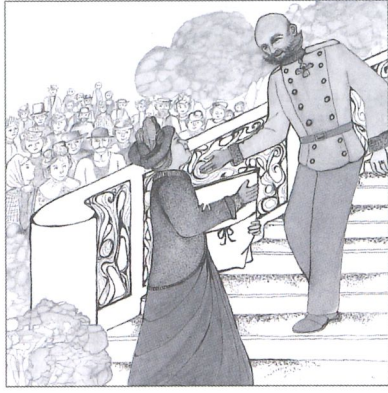
After their stay in the Caucasus Bertha and Arthur returned to Vienna in 1885, where they became reconciled with Arthur's family. Bertha started to write a book to denounce the horrors of war. In her time warfare was still commonly glorified. People spoke about war in terms of 'heroism' and 'glory of the fatherland'. But in her book Bertha wanted to show the stories of the victims, of the surviving families, of the disabled. She described how war destroyed the lives of all those involved, bringing poverty and fear.

'Lay Down Your Arms!' was published in 1889, when Bertha was 46 years old. The book caused shock waves amongst its readers. These readers, most of whom came from a middle class environment, were in no way familiar with the brutal realities of war. 'Lay Down Your Arms!' was translated into 16 languages, and soon millions of copies were sold. It brought about a massive change in the way people were thinking about war and peace. All of a sudden, Bertha von Suttner was an internationally renowned personality. She was invited everywhere to give lectures, speak to congresses and write articles. With full

conviction she grabbed those chances to reach even more people. To her delight, in Paris and London she met people who shared the ideals she had developed herself during her years in the Caucasus.

Internationally, the peace movement gained wings, and Bertha grew out to become the star of this movement. This was due not only to the success of her book, but also to her charismatic personality and power to persuade. On one occasion during a congress in Rome she held a flaming oration that lasted a full hour, unprepared and in Italian.

She was certainly not the first to plead for peace. Around the year 1500 Erasmus already wrote: 'the people love peace, but their rulers long for war'. But Bertha was the first to mobilize public opinion so effectively, that the peace movement became a worldwide factor of importance.



Bertha von Suttner was a staunch peace activist, but certainly not a naive idealist. She emphasized that peace could only be attained when all countries of the world would bind themselves to each other by treaties. In other words, she pleaded for the establishment of what would now be called the United Nations. You would expect Bertha to be anti-militaristic, but in her opinion an international armed force remained necessary to protect human rights.

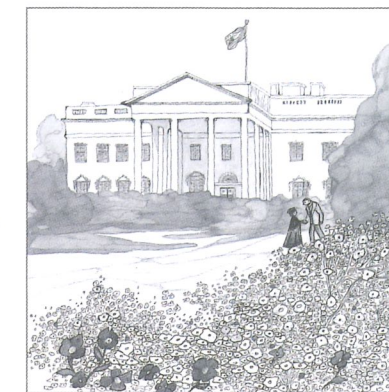
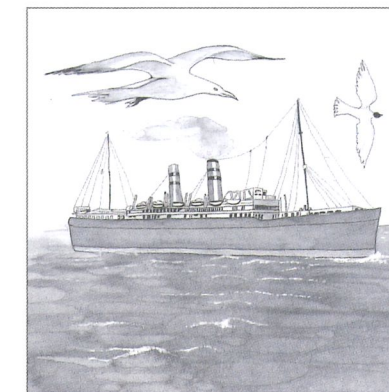
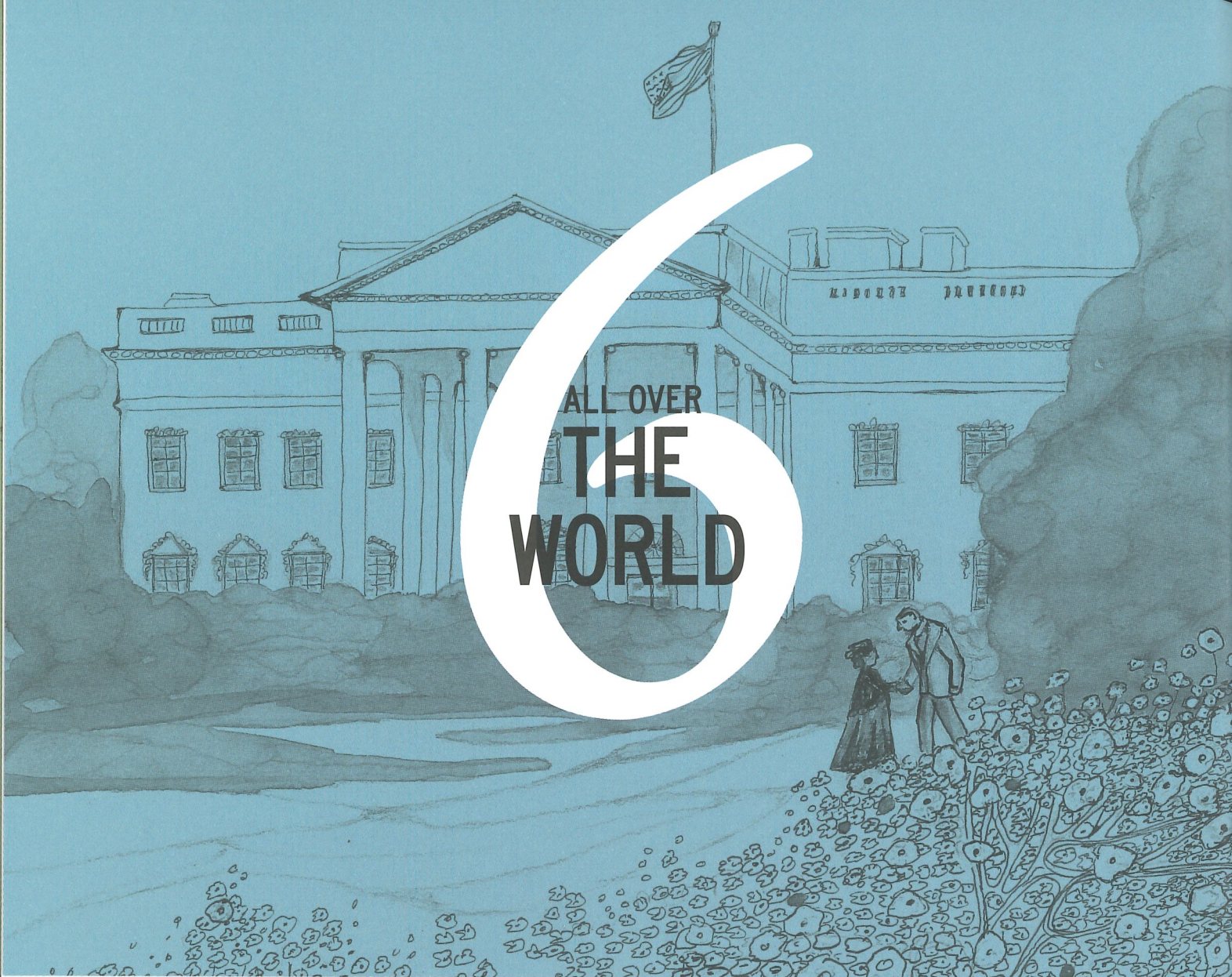
Bertha was very modern and progressive for her time in many ways. She supported the evolution theory and battled – together with her husband Arthur – against anti-Semitism. Above all, Bertha pleaded for equal social and political rights for all people, because she knew this would lead to more chances for peace in the future.

Bertha also knew that the idea of establishing an Arbitration Court circulated in scholarly circles. In her view, this idea could only succeed in case of support by the public opinion. And so, in 1897, she gathered thousands of signatures for a petition she handed over to the Austrian

Emperor Franz Joseph. Eventually, during the first conference at which heads of state discussed peace, this idea became reality.

At a congress in The Hague she met Aletta Jacobs, a Dutch women's rights activist. Bertha thought that striving for peace was of much greater importance than women's emancipation, and she asked Aletta to put her powers and energy in service of the peace ideal instead. Aletta refused – she thought the battle for women's suffrage was more important –. After many congresses and letters, the gap between the two lessened. Aletta admitted that the battle for peace was also in the interest of women, and Bertha recognized that admitting women to political offices was also in the interest of peace. Afterwards, in their lectures and writings both Aletta and Bertha showed that the peace movement and the movement for women's rights could reinforce one another.



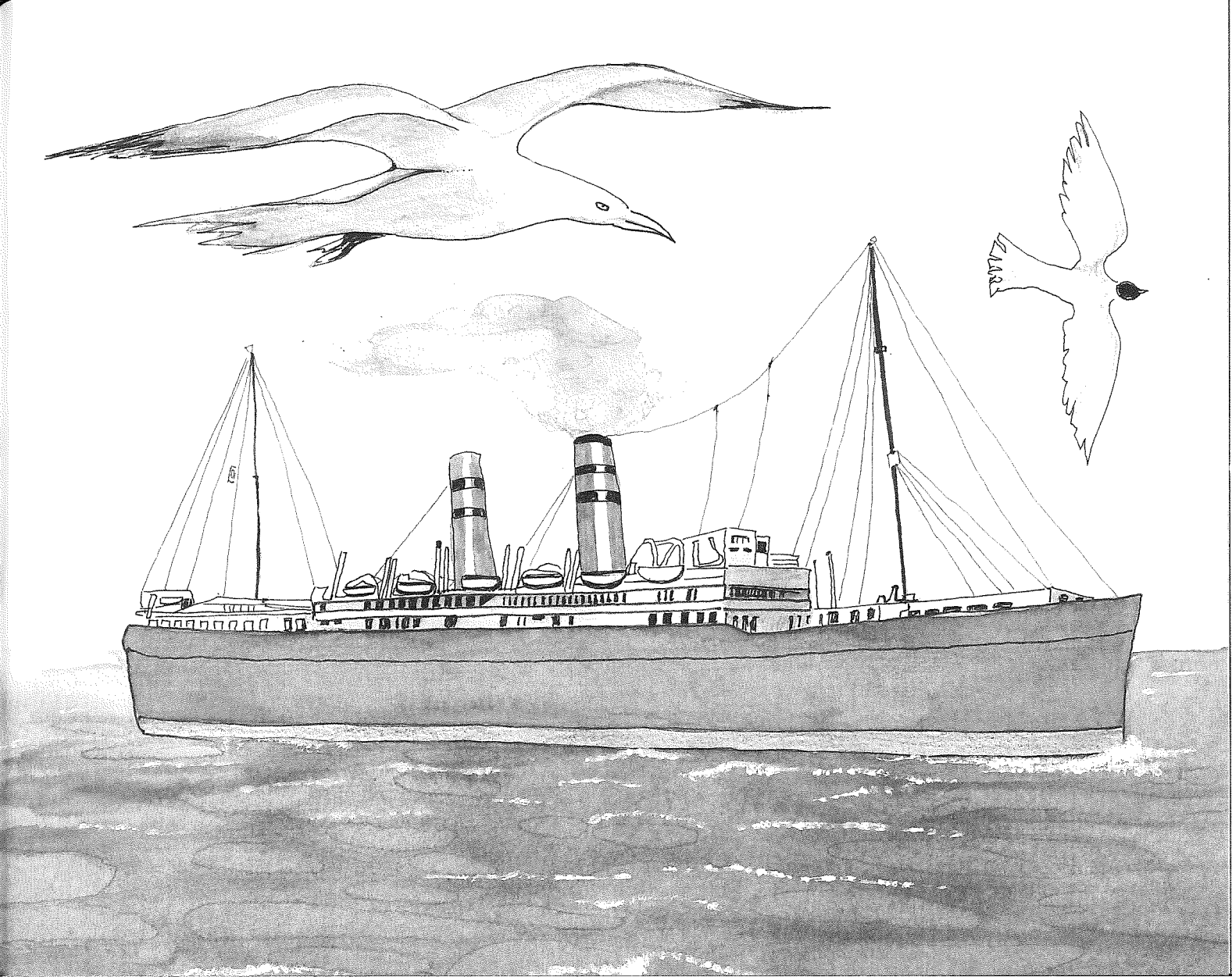
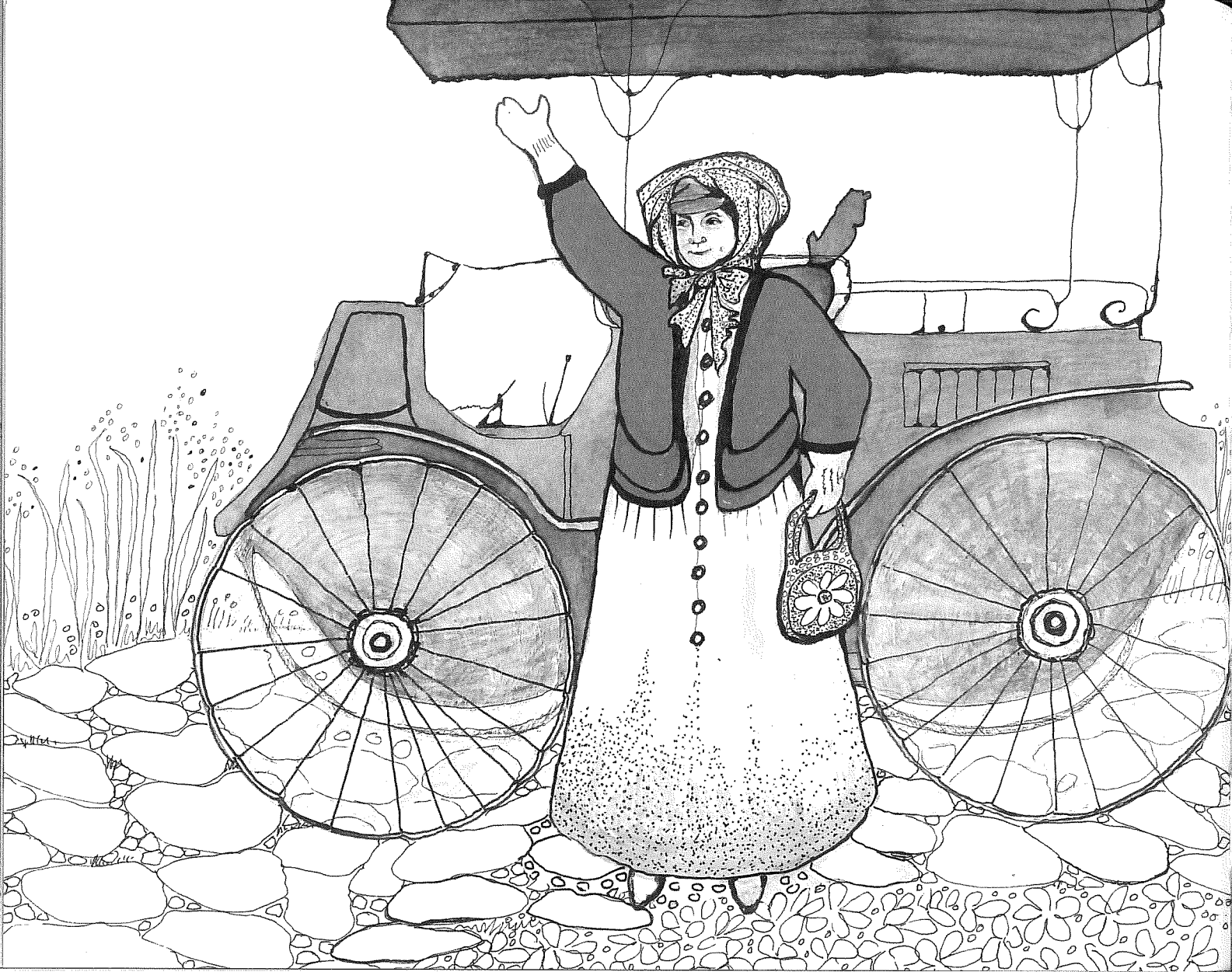


After Bertha had obtained her massive success with her book 'Die Waffen nieder!', she succeeded to strengthen public support for the peace ideal even more by her many lectures. This was the time to found peace movements – starting in Austria, and continuing in Germany and Hungary –. With her good friend and comrade in arms Alfred Fried she started a peace magazine that would become an important platform for pacifism.

The time had come for peace movements to unite their forces internationally. Initially, Bertha only acted as an inspirational force, but afterwards accepted administrative responsibilities as well. The many travels her work required were exhausting. Travelling in the 19th century was much different from travelling now: some railroads existed in Europe, but a refined network of railways was still absent. People mostly had to travel by stage-coaches. Around 1900 the first cars appeared, but they had to make their way over bumpy dirt roads. Bertha, however, gladly accepted all these discomforts in order to spread her plea for peace.

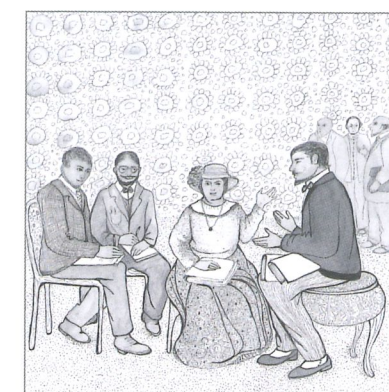
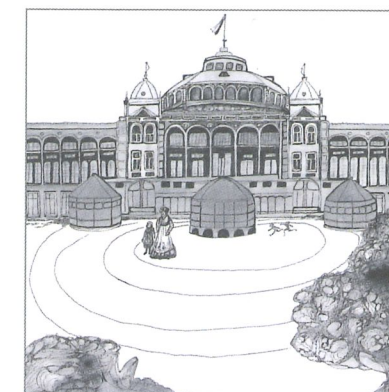
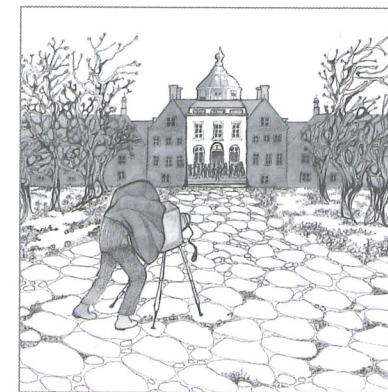
In 1904 – Bertha was by now 61 – she visited the United States. The reason for her visit across the ocean was the World Peace Conference in Boston, where she, an honorary guest from Europe, played a central role. After the conference, Bertha moved from city to city and held lectures everywhere, sometimes three a day. She was received in the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Euphorically, Bertha returned from the US. Her seven months trip had been a train of victories and she was surprised and happy to see that pacifism in the United States was far more developed than in Europe. So much enthusiasm! So many peace activities! American schools even offered their pupils peace education! In 1912 she went to America for a second time (fortunately she didn't travel on the Titanic). During several months she travelled through the country, from East coast to West coast. She delivered a speech in every city she passed. She often ended her speeches with the following encouragement: "Universal Peace is not a matter of possibility, it is a matter of necessity. Endure, endure, endure." Everyone hung on her lips!





7 FIRST PEACE CONFERENCE



By the end of the 19th century the international peace movement had achieved such an importance, that heads of state could no longer ignore the subject of peace. In 1899 the Russian Czar Nicholas II brought together political leaders from countries all over the world. Thereafter, this meeting became known as the first Peace Conference, and it took place in The Hague. Huis Ten Bosch, the summer palace of Queen Wilhelmina, was selected as a location. Bertha von Suttner regarded the conference as the crowning glory of her work. Finally, heads of state would consider the topic of peace seriously, without having a war as the direct cause for the meeting. Of course, she wanted to attend the conference, but despite the fact that friend and enemy perceived her as the absolute icon of the peace movement, she had not been invited. She was only allowed to be present at the opening.

Bertha however found a respectable alternative. She took residence in the Kurhaus hotel, and from there held 'salon' for the many journalists, politicians and peace activists that had come to The Hague. They were all very eager to exchange views with her. More importantly, preceding

many debates at the formal Peace conference, politically sensitive matters were first thoroughly discussed at her salon. There was a busy coming and going between Huis ten Bosch and the Kurhaus.

The most important result of the conference was the decision of the 26 states present to found a Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. In essence this meant: whenever two countries would have a conflict to solve, they could now submit their dispute to this court and settle it by means of arbitration. For the first time in history, an institute had come into being that could serve as an alternative to warfare.

Despite these great international successes Bertha was mocked and besmirched in her own country. When passing the street, she had to navigate between roses and rotten tomatoes thrown at her. Today Austria has embraced her great daughter wholeheartedly – Bertha's portrait decorates the Austrian 2-euro-coin –.

DIE WAFFEN NIEDER!

“Die Waffen nieder!”(‘Lay Down Your Arms’) was published in 1889 and the book immediately gained an overwhelming success -it is still regarded as one of the most important anti-war novels in history-. Bertha von Suttner had already spoken out against war in earlier works, but in Die Waffen nieder! she expressed her message in the form of a novel. By doing so, she hoped to play on the emotions of the general public.

The book describes in first-person narrative the life of the Austrian aristocrat Martha Althaus. Her life is defined by the wars that rage in her time between Austria and other European countries. At the beginning of the book Martha is a girl, child of a militaristic and extremely nationalistic culture in which war is exalted and men ardently rush to battle to fight for the greater glory of their fatherland. Even young Martha cannot imagine anything more beautiful; her first husband Arno Dotzky is, accordingly, a military man. When he goes to battle in the Austrian war against the forces for independence in northern Italy, Martha starts to doubt the rightfulness and merit of the war that is embraced by all around her with blind enthusiasm. Arno dies in the bloody battle of Solferino of 1859, and Martha becomes a convinced

pacifist. After some years, she remarries Baron Friedrich von Tilling, who shares her pacifist ideals and abhorrence of a nationalistic passion for war, although he is an officer in the army himself. Therefore, Von Tilling – who is loosely based on Bertha’s husband Arthur von Suttner – is, next to Martha, the second hero of the story. Martha has to endure terrible fears when he participates in the Second Schleswig War of 1864 between Prussia and Denmark, and the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. This war leads to an outbreak of cholera that takes the lives of Martha’s sisters and brother, after which her father dies of grief. Von Tilling consequently decides to give up the military profession and to support Martha completely. But his life is also taken, during the French-German war of 1870, when the couple finds itself in Paris. Being Austrian, Von Tilling is taken for a spy and executed by French nationalists. The book ends in moderate optimism: Martha’s son shows interest for his mother’s ideals, which opens the possibility for a new and better future.

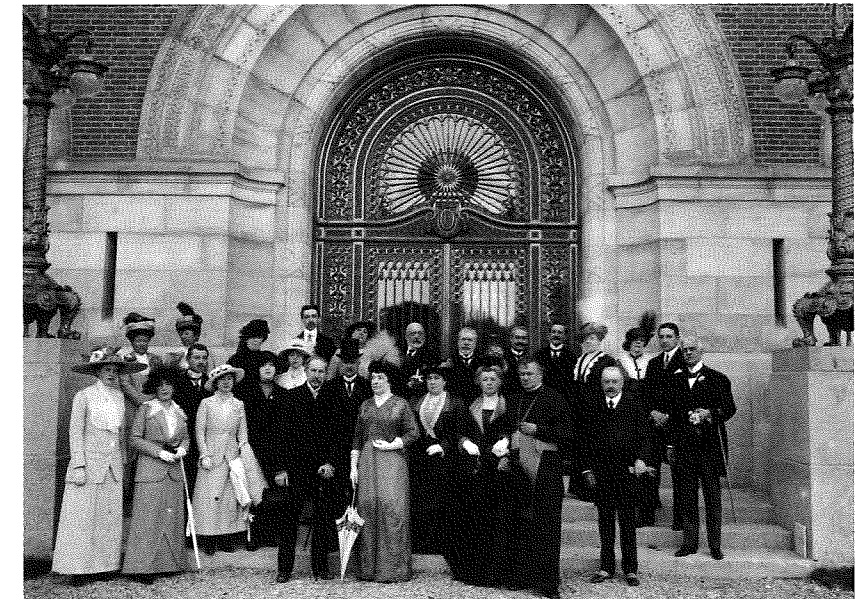


FROM THE NOBEL LECTURE “THE EVOLUTION OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT”

Thus pacifism faces no easy struggle. This question of whether violence or law shall prevail between states is the most vital of the problems of our eventful era, and the most serious in its repercussions. The beneficial results of a secure world peace are almost inconceivable, but even more inconceivable are the consequences of the threatening world war which many misguided people are prepared to precipitate. The advocates of pacifism are well aware how meager are their resources of personal influence and power. They know that they are still few in number and weak in authority, but when they realistically consider themselves and the ideal they serve, they see themselves as the servants of the greatest of all causes. On the solution of this problem depends whether our Europe will become a showpiece of ruins and failure, or whether we can avoid this danger and so enter sooner the coming era of secure peace and law in which a civilization of unimagined glory will develop.

The many aspects of this question are what the second Hague Conference should be discussing rather than the proposed topics concerning the laws and practices of war at sea, the bombardment of ports, towns, and villages, the laying of mines, and so on. The contents of this agenda demonstrate that, although the supporters

of the existing structure of society, which accepts war, come to a peace conference prepared to modify the nature of war, they are basically trying to keep the present system intact. The advocates of pacifism, inside and outside the Conference, will, however, defend their objectives and press forward another step toward their goal - the goal which, to repeat Roosevelt's words, affirms the duty of his government and of all governments „to bring nearer the time when the sword shall not be the arbiter among nations“.





BERTHA VON SUTTNER'S LIFE

1843

June 9th, born as the posthumous daughter of an Austrian field marshal

1873-1875

Serving as a governess in the Von Suttner household in Vienna

1875

Bertha briefly works as a secretary in Paris for Alfred Nobel, but quickly returns to her beloved Arthur von Suttner in Vienna, whom she marries in 1876

1876 BIS 1885

Stay in the Caucasus, where Bertha von Suttner develops her ideas on world peace

1889

Publication of her best known book "Die Waffen nieder!"

1891

Bertha initiates the Austrian peace society

1899

First Hague Peace Conference

1905

Bertha is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

1912

Tour of the United States

1914

June 21st, Bertha von Suttner dies, a few weeks before the outbreak of the First World War

*Bust of Bertha von Suttner
by Ingrid Rollema,
3 September 2013*

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