

THE POPE'S PLEA FOR PEACE.

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Amidst all the horrors of this appalling war, that is devastating so much of the world, it is well that there is one voice that can recall, with power, the minds of men to the teaching of the Gospel of Christ.

Benedict XV may be as the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and men may think that, in the shock and din of arms, his words must be lost, yet he is heard, and his appeal is going home to many hearts that, in these bad days, are yearning for some one to show us good things. Surely God has not made us for this horrible butchery; surely Christ, our Lord, has not come into the world in vain, and left His peace, as a legacy to men, for nothing.

In rare cases, war may be lawful, but it is so terrible in itself, it involves so much that is bad, morally and materially, that it can only be justified as a last resort. But when it is waged on a world-wide scale, such as the present awful war, nothing but the direct necessity and an absolutely just cause can justify its inception, or its continuance, and unless Christianity is to be set aside as irrelevant to the supreme crises of the world, there must be some moral power, some representative of right to which the combatants are bound to submit.

What are they fighting for? The Pope asks them to pause for a moment in the devastating strife, and see if there is no possibility of making peace, until one side or the other is crushed or exhausted. One would think that the proposition is so fair, so reasonable that it would be received on all sides with gratitude; and yet, as far as the public know, it has met with no response.

Even by some Catholic publicists it has been answered in terms that, to say the least, are not edifying. The London *Tablet*, which poses as an organ of Catholicism, brushed aside contemptuously the suggestion that Mr. Redmond, as the representative of Catholic Ireland, should lend his influence with the British Cabinet in support of the Pope's proposal. We have sometimes heard of people who are Englishmen first, and Catholics after; but it is carrying that spirit

rather far to tell us, as the *Tablet* has done, that Mr. Redmond should not think it worth his while to put the Pope's appeal for peace before the Prime Minister of England.

What is the explanation of this miserable attitude? In their hearts, I dare say, the *Tablet* people think themselves true and loyal Catholics, and, as against any of the sects of English Protestants, the description would be correct enough. But when it comes to a war in which England is engaged, it seems to be 'My country right or wrong,' and pretty much the same deference for the Pope from Catholics as from others.

There is something of the same spirit in Mr. Redmond's refusal to interfere. He will not touch the Pope, or his letter; he does not even condescend to mention them. He is a Catholic, and an Irishman; in his very blood there must be something that would warm to Rome, and the successor of the Fisherman. Yet he cannot find one word of courtesy or deference for the Head of the Church, but puts aside his solemn and fatherly appeal, made in the name of Christ our Lord, as if it were a resolution passed by some pettifogging political clique. It is painful and somewhat humiliating, but we all know that in his inner mind Mr. Redmond thinks and feels differently from the *Tablet* men. They are Englishmen; their blood is up; they are engaged in a desperate war for the mastery of the world; between England and Germany at present it is a fight for the 'belt;' not a mere decoration, but a symbol of universal power. As a distinguished publicist in a London newspaper stated recently, it is the manifest design of Providence that the Anglo-Saxon race should control the destinies of the world, and the English Catholics, I am sorry to say, breathe that spirit as arrogantly as the rest of their countrymen. But Mr. Redmond, at the back of his mind, cares, I day say, just as much for the average Irishman for Anglo-Saxon domination; but the exigencies of politics compel him to simulate feelings that he cannot possibly entertain. Home Rule has been kept, for many years, dangling before his nose, like the carrot before the donkey; he gets a sufficient sniff of it occasionally to keep him draughting for the English Government, and he fears now that, if he attempted to show any independence as an Irishman, or any spirit as a Catholic, his English allies or masters

would gladly find their excuse for throwing him over, and evading their promises on Home Rule. To my mind, that is the explanation of his attitude towards the Pope.

It is a pitiable position for a National leader, and it remains to be seen whether the game is worth the candle.

All the interests of his country are on the side of peace. However the war ends, Ireland has nothing to gain; but while it lasts, it is piling upon us a weight of debt which will impoverish and cripple us for generations; yet one can hardly say so much publicly without provoking the angriest attacks.

In England, at the present moment, you might as well argue with an infuriated bull as ask them to contemplate the possibility of there being anything to be said on the side of Germany. There are two sides to every question, except this war. The Germans are now the intolerable aggressive people that the Russians were up to the war with Japan, and the French at an earlier period; they are the enemies of England, and her rivals, and consequently can be inspired only from the lower regions. No crime is too black to impute to them; they are not men but demons; and this is driven into the minds of the people, by the most powerful propaganda that any government could command. The newspaper press in England and Ireland has been filling the minds of the people with detailed accounts of the most revolting crimes, which they allege have been committed by the German armies without rhyme or reason, but in the wantonness of diabolical and bestial wickedness. Tales are told of crimes in Belgium that wring the souls of all decent men, and are especially horrifying to Catholics.

The result is a burning hate in the minds of the people. That is the purpose of the propaganda. To me it seems cruelly unjust. I have been receiving letters through the post, giving in detail descriptions of abominable crimes said to have been committed by German soldiers and officers in Belgium, but which I am convinced have no existence except in the disorders of very foul and corrupt imaginations.

There is no attempt at reason, no weighing of evidence; the worse and filthier the story, the less it seems to require sifting.

I have read the report of the Bryce Commission, and attach very little importance to it. Every member of the Commission is an Englishman. Its whole purpose was to make out a case against the Germans – a popular case, that would harrow the minds of the public, but which would be recommended by the appearance and form of a judicial inquiry. What value would be set in England on a corresponding report made out by Germans? It is all a fraud upon simple people. The judges were not impartial, and the whole evidence was gathered from poor Belgians whose minds were warped and disordered by their cruel sufferings in the war.

But the result is a national hatred, such as I believe was never felt by one Christian nation for another. That is the great difficulty now in the way of peace. It prevents the Pope's most blessed appeal from getting a fair hearing; and leading English newspapers have not hesitated to suggest that it was made, not for peace, for its own sake, but in the interest of Germany and Austria!

That makes it a higher duty of Catholics everywhere, and particularly in neutral countries, to rally to the side of the Pope, and to draw to him the weight of impartial opinion.

It is only in these countries that anything toward peace can now be done. The belligerents are blinded by passion, and self-interest, and cannot form a reasonable judgment on the war or its issues. If feeling in Germany is like what it is in England, then they are as hopeless as if two wild beasts were engaged in a death struggle, and there is little use in appealing to their sense of right and religion.

But the impartial opinion of neutral nations is a great force on the side of God and humanity, and is one of the *imponderables* that tell in great crises of the world. The United States of America, if they maintain a strict neutrality, can throw an immense weight on the side of peace, and they owe it to themselves and to the world to use their power to stop this mad carnage. If the belligerents will not listen to one who appeals to them in the name of the God and Saviour whom they all profess to worship and follow, they may show more deference to a powerful nation that represents the material interests of the world that are being squandered, and at the same time is in sympathy, I

should hope, with the higher views and principles which inspire the Pope.

One of the most anxious aspects of this war, for neutrals, is its gradual extension. It is like a great conflagration, which is a danger in all directions, until it is overpowered. One after another, nations are being drawn into it; not for any legitimate interest which they have in the original quarrel, but for the hopes that are offered on either side. Was there ever anything more disgraceful in the world than the open corruption of States and individuals that is going on in the Balkans? And each nation that is drawn into the vortex becomes a reason for the interference of some other nation, and so it goes on, steadily widening the area of its devastation. Surely there is here sufficient ground for a great people like those of the United States, who stand outside all these European rivalries and hatreds, to call a truce, and ask the belligerents, at least, to state what they are fighting for, and on what terms they are prepared to make peace.

It is all very well to talk platitudes about vindicating small nationalities; but that, to use a rather strong phrase, is 'too thin' for sensible people. Nor is it much better to tell us that German Militarism must be crushed. Each country must be the judge of its own requirements. The United States would have no right to say to England that she should reduce her navy. And England has as little right to say to Germany that she must reduce her army. 'Live and let live' holds for nations as for individuals, and no nation has a right to aim at the crushing and annihilation of another. That is one essential point in the Pope's great letter. You cannot kill a nation. You may overthrow it for the time being, but its spirit will live, and assert itself, and the greater the wrong that it is made to suffer, the more violent will be its upheaval at some future time.

We see it in this very war. If Germany in 1870 had been content with exacting a heavy money indemnity from France, we should not have the present trouble. But the loss of Alsace and Lorraine has rankled in the body politic in France, and *la revanche* has become a fixed idea, and lies at the very root of the combination that is now arrayed against Germany. It is that discontent of France that has driven her, a revolutionary democratic country, into an alliance with

the most absolute despotism in the world, and schooled her to submit to the loss of Egypt, and to use the anti-German feeling in England for her revenge. But for the seizure of Alsace and Lorraine the present European war would be an impossibility. And if, as the result of this war, Germany is beaten, and carved into fragments, as prominent public men in England suggest, does any one imagine that a great nation of 63,000,000 of people will lie down patiently under the oppression and forfeit her place in the world forever? You might as well hope to suppress a volcano by heaping rubbish upon it. Europe, in such a state of things, would be in permanent unrest; and just as the French nursed their sense of wrong for forty years, and their astute diplomacy used the interests and the feelings of other countries, until they got their chance, so too would Germany, who, as surely as she was crushed, would never rest until she regained her place amongst the nations.

That is the profound truth which the Pope proclaims, and generations yet unborn will bless him for it:

‘Nor let it be said the immense conflict cannot be settled without the violence of war. Lay aside your mutual purpose of destruction; remember that nations do not die; humbled and oppressed, they chafe under the yoke imposed upon them, preparing a renewal of the combat, and passing down from generation to generation a mournful heritage of hatred and revenge.’

There is more wisdom in these words, than in the suggestions of pride and arrogance which blind men to the dangers that are right in their path. And those who now disregard them, and drive their people, like sheep, to the slaughter, may live to regret the loss of the opportunity which the Pope has given them.

At either side, they hope, or pretend to hope, for complete victory. But what if they are wrong, if they find that national conceit has led them astray, and they have to taste the bitterness of defeat? War is an uncertain game, and it is a terrible responsibility for statesmen to risk their country’s existence on a throw of the dice.

What if it turn out that the forces on either side are so great that a decisive victory is impossible? Are they to go on with the slaughter until they have to cease from their exhaustion?

Here again the words of the Pope contemplating with the pain and sorrow of a father the ruin and desolation of 'Europe, the garden of the world, sown with corpses,' may well shake the stoutest heart, and make it dread the condemnation of the great Father in Heaven, if it is obdurate to their appeal:

'The abounding wealth, with which God, the Creator, has enriched the lands that are subject to you, allow you to go on with the struggle; but at what a cost? Let the thousands of young lives quenched every day on the fields of battle make answer; answer the ruins of so many towns and villages, of so many monuments raised by the piety and genius of your ancestors. And the bitter tears shed in the secrecy of home, or at the foot of altars where suppliants beseech – do not these also repeat that the price of the long drawn-out struggle is great, too great?'

It is all so true, so noble, that it wrings one's heart to think that there is no power in the world to give it effect. There is something intensely sad in the Pope's appeal to 'all, whosoever are the friends of peace the world over, to give us a helping hand in order to hasten the termination of the war.' And the response, so far, has been disappointing. Still we must never forget that the destinies of nations and the issues of war are in the hands of Him 'by whom kings reign.' To Him we must turn in humble prayer. He can give effect to the words of His Vicar, and calm the storm that is raging in men's hearts. But whatever be the design of his all-holy Providence, we Catholics should thank and bless Him for giving us a Pope who, in these days of stress, is so worthily sustaining the authority of his sacred office, and preaching in the midst of the storm of human passions the Gospel of the Prince of Peace. Like Noe in a time of wrath, he is being made a reconciliation, and however men may seem to disregard his words, we may be sure that they are awakening a response in many hearts.

There is a magnificent broadness in this appeal of the Pope; he addresses not only those within his own fold, but, conscious of his sacred mission, he sends the cry of peace which breaks from his heart to 'the friends of peace the world over.' It is the cause of humanity; it cuts deeper than ordinary temporal interests; it is a question of saving the greatest, the most cultured, the most progressive nations of the world from a wild frenzy in which they are destroying one another

and blasting the hopes of their children for generations. Nothing like it has ever been seen in the world. One might be tempted to think that God had surrendered His government of this earth to bad demons who drove men to reject and repudiate the whole teaching of Christ. We have got down to the elemental principles that distinguish human society from herds of wild beasts; and therefore it is time for every one who respects our human nature, who believes in God and our accountability to Him, who professes the Gospel of Christ, to do his or her part to put an end to this revolting slaughter, which is a disgrace to our civilization and a scandal to our religion. We may hope that in the great United States of America some moral power may be forthcoming to second the Pope's appeal, and help the realisation of his prayer that 'the merciful Jesus, through the intercession of His Sorrowful Mother, may grant that, at last, after so horrible a storm, the dawn of peace may break, placid and radiant, an image of His own Divine Countenance.'

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