THE CHURCHES AND THE PRESENT WAR.

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I am a man *of* peace and *for* peace. The thought of war fills me with horror. My soul revolts at its destruction and devastation. My heart grows sick of the slaughter.

But I am not opposed to this war. At its first declaration, my services were offered to the government at home until I could be used to greater advantage elsewhere; but at the front, when needed there more than here. My attitude is still the same—only with ever-increasing desire to do not merely my “bit” but my *best* toward winning such a victory as to insure permanent peace for the future.

Jesus Christ is known as “The Prince of Peace”. Over His manger-crib the angels sang of peace on earth through Him. Amid His last promises given before the crucifixion was that to give to the disciples such a peace as the world will always be unable to offer. In the general acceptance of the principles propounded by Him lies the only hope for universal peace.

And yet Jesus made no profession of “pacifism”, as we now use that word. The first thing He did after being baptized was to wage a mighty battle with Satan. From thence even to Calvary’s crest His progress was not “on flowery beds of ease”. Almost every step of the way was contested by either the devil or devilish men. “Think not that I came to send peace on the earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword”, is His answer to the “peace at any price” plea. Then He tells how His entrance into the world can but bring about conflicts. To have lasting peace the conflict must continue until wrong is dethroned and the “Golden Rule” accepted as the law governing human relationships. There are not only justifiable but justified wars.

For the churches to have an active part in helping to wage a war it must be seen to be one in which are involved principles worth fighting for. Will humanity be helped by victory? Will the failure to fight be a submission to Satan? Could a Christian put up his money or lay down his life in defense of the principles for which the fight is being made? My study of the present war has convinced me that there are weightier reasons than loyalty to our country (though that should prove a powerful appeal) to lead the churches to take more than a sympathetic interest in its outcome. Consider a few of these:

By its repudiation of equal rights to its own citizens, the German government has set itself in defiance of the proclamation of the worth of the individual made by the Head of the Church. Study its system of government if you would find the most autocratic assumption of power in our age. Where else are the people so ignored with regard to foreign affairs? The retired chancellor, Prince Von Bülow, bluntly asserted in defense of this policy that the Germans are not capable of self-government, saying: "We are not a political people." In 1910, at Königsberg, William II said: "Looking upon myself as the instrument of the Lord, regardless of the views and the opinions of the hour, I go on my way." At another time, he said: "There is but one master in this country; 'tis I, and I will bear no other." He has seemed very fond of saying: "The will of the king is the highest law." Such arrogance on the part of any earthly individual is so out of harmony with the teachings of our Lord that the churches might well do more than pray for the outcome of this war to be such that no part of the world will ever again permit a mere man to make such assertions.

Again, the Prussian doctrine that might makes right and the duplicity of its policy in striving to enforce this doctrine on the rest of the world will remain a menace to the world, a source of terror to weak nations, an obstacle to arbitration, and an unanswerable argument against dis-

armament so long as it is permitted to occupy an important place at the council table of the nations. In keeping with its spirit, international law is made to be broken at the behest of convenience and treaties become but "scraps of paper" with which to kindle fresh fires of conflict.

Frederick the Great said, in 1740: "The question of right is an affair of ministers." And again: "Take what you can; you are never wrong unless you are obliged to give back." The whole world is acquainted with the cause of the Franco-German war of 1870. Finding that the French army was not prepared for war and that the German were, Bismarck deliberately insulted the French people through their ambassador and forced them into war. "Bismarck always regarded the manner in which he precipitated this war as a masterpiece in state-craft. It remained a kind of glorious example of true public policy for the next generation of public men in Germany."* The German military system may be seen in such assertions as these: "Bribery of enemies' subjects, acceptance of offers of treachery, utilization of discontented elements in the population, support of pretenders and the like, are permissible; indeed international law is in no way opposed to the exploitation of crimes of third parties."† "A war conducted with energy cannot be directed against the combatants of the enemy state and the positions they occupy, but will and must in like manner seek to destroy the total intellectual and moral resources of the latter. Humanitarian claims, such as the protection of men and their goods, can only be taken into consideration in so far as the nature and objects of the war will permit."‡

In interpreting these rules into action, neutrals lose their rights. Bethman-Hollweg said to the Reichstag,

* See "The War Message and the Facts Behind it", No. 1 of the War Information series, published by the Committee on Public Information, Washington, D. C., for this and more illuminating quotations with regard to the causes of the war.

† German War Code, standard translation, p. 85.

‡ I. d., authorized translation, pp. 1-3, 52.

August 4, 1914: "We are now in a state of necessity, and necessity knows no law. Our troops have occupied Luxemburg [neutral] and perhaps already have entered Belgian territory. Gentlemen, this is a breach of international law. The wrong—I speak openly—the wrong we hereby commit we will try to make good as soon as our military aims have been attained. He who is menaced as we are, and is fighting for his highest possession, can only consider how he is to hack his way through."

The pursuance of such a policy as this finally forced our country unwillingly to enter the war. When our President protested against the ruthless violation of international law by sinking neutral ships without warning, assurance was given that such should cease. But this promise meant nothing when the German chancellor desired to resume the slaughter of peaceful neutrals. On January 31, 1917, he said: "When the most ruthless methods are considered the best calculated to lead us to victory . . . they must be employed. The moment has now arrived. Last August [when assurances were given to the United States] the time was not yet ripe, but today the moment has come, when, with the greatest prospect of success, we can undertake this enterprise." Note the result to neutral America; before war was declared, "226 American citizens, *many of them women and children*, had lost their lives by the action of German submarines, and in most instances without the faintest color of international right."⁸

After this declaration of unrestricted frightfulness was made and while still feigning friendship for our country, the famous (or infamous) "Zimmerman note" came into the possession of our diplomatic forces. The following double dealings were to be proposed to Mexico, with whom we were also at peace: "On February 1 we intend to begin submarine warfare unrestricted. In spite of this, it is our intention to keep neutral the United States of

⁸ "The War Message and the Facts Behind It."

America. If this attempt is not successful, we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to conquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona."

The results to neutral America of this campaign of frightfulness are summed up in the following scathing arraignment in the House of Representatives by Mr. Lincoln of Maryland:

"As a reward for our neutrality what have we received at the hands of William II?

"He has set the torch of the incendiary to our factories, our work-shops, our ships, and our wharves.

"He has laid the bomb of the assassin in our munition plants and the holds of our ships.

"He has sought to corrupt our manhood with a selfish dream of peace when there is no peace.

"He has wilfully butchered our citizens on the high seas.

"He has destroyed our commerce.

"He seeks to terrify us with his devilish policy of frightfulness.

"He has violated every canon of international decency and set at naught every solemn treaty and every precept of international law.

"He has plunged the world into the maddest orgy of blood, rapine, and murder which history records.

"He has intrigued against our peace at home and abroad.

"He seeks to destroy our civilization. Patience is no longer a virtue, further endurance is cowardice, submission to Prussian demands is slavery."

And yet when we remember that the acts of Prussianism toward America were mild compared to its outrages upon the small nations of Europe, the inexcusable slaughter of small children, the raping of women, the wanton

destruction of property, we can begin to recognize the horror of the fate which would have been ours had Germany won an easy victory at this time. The most effective defense of our homes and loved ones is to win the war before it is brought into our own borders.

Against the above outlined spirit of Prussianism place the calm words of the man "who kept us out of war" as long as he could:

"The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquests, no dominion. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and freedom of nations can make them.

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"We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.

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"There is one choice we cannot make, we are incapable of making: we will not choose the path of submission and suffer the most sacred rights of our nation and our people to be ignored or violated. The wrongs against which we now array ourselves are no common wrongs; they cut to the very roots of human life.

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"It is a distressing and oppressive duty, gentlemen of the Congress, which I have performed in thus addressing you. There are, it may be, many months of fiery trial and sacrifice ahead of us. It is a fearful thing to lead this great, peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance.

“But the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free people as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.”||

As it will be considered in another connection, I mention here without so full discussion another item. This is the Prussianized idea of God which debases Him and exalts the so-called super-man. What Christian could read the blatant preachments of the Kaiser to his soldiers and sailors without feeling a righteous indignation at the way he would make out of God a mere appendage to the German throne? In connecting his own name with God, he invariably places himself first. It is ever “*mich und Gott*”. When some one remarked to Abraham Lincoln during our Civil War, “Surely, Mr. President, God is on our side”, he answered, “That does not so much concern me as that we shall be on God’s side”. To the German, however, it is always, “*Gott mit uns*”. When all is considered, it seems to me that this kind of a conception of the relative importance of favored men and God is at the root of the whole trouble with Prussianism. Push God from His throne, and men invariable descend lower than they were before. It was so with the French when they sought to legislate God out of existence. It is so with the Kaiser who puts himself first, God a poor second. Should he prevail, this idea of God would be forced upon the world. Against this the churches may well put their prayers, their men, and their money.

With these reasons why the churches can, and should, enter heartily into helping to win the war (and others could be added), let us now consider the part the churches

|| President Wilson’s Message to Congress, April 2, 1917.

have taken and are taking to make the successful issue sure.

First: Think of what they have done to assist in the production, conservation, and utilization of the material resources of our nation. When we entered the war we had just gone through a year of short crops. This made certain a shortage of food-stuffs. The necessity of sharing with our allies added to the burden upon us. The year into which we were entering must be marked by increased production of the necessities of life. Upon whom should the government call for aid? It considered the churches among the first and most important of agencies in this. Nor did it call upon them in vain. The same was true in the campaign for conserving the supplies on hand. The campaign against waste was made largely through the churches and by church people. Nor was it different when we were faced with a coal famine. Not only have the churches done their part toward a better distribution so that none might suffer, but by combining in services in ways which would not otherwise have been considered at all they have shown their willingness to work with the government in winning the war.

Again: The churches have gladly given their very best young manhood, urging them to quit themselves like men. In the examinations for the army and navy it was found that a very large percentage of the young men of the country were unfit for the best service. Diseases, often caused by excesses and sins, were largely responsible for this sad state. Observation has proven that a very far larger percentage of young men who were church workers have stood the severe tests than have those from any other source. When they have failed it has generally been due to some constitutional defect or deformity. And what a large percentage of those not actively influenced by some church have failed on account of trouble caused from drink, cigarettes, excesses, or venereal diseases. The churches gave of their best and they gave largely the very best young men in our country's service today.

The churches were the readiest of all to respond to appeals to provide for the welfare of the men in the camps and at the front. Every Red Cross and army Y. M. C. A. campaign would have failed but for the support and liberality of the churches and their members. Every bond issue of the government has been over-subscribed mainly because of the boosting done through the churches and church people. Many a preacher whose meager salary seemed too small for the needs of his large family has bought Liberty Bonds when it meant real sacrifice to do so. And now each of his children is clamoring for Baby Bonds, nor do they call in vain. So loyal has been the response of the churches to the various appeals made by the government that it would not undertake the collection of the increased income taxes without appealing to the preachers for sympathetic co-operation. In such words as these does the Commissioner of Internal Revenue recognize the importance of the support by the clergymen throughout the country: "Your government turns to you, as one of a class that has never failed it, for service that in this crucial period no other class can render. You have nobly done and are doing your part. . . . It is a great comfort to realize that in you, and other clergymen of America, we have a body of sympathetic and supporting fellow citizens on whom the government can rely for earnest co-operation in these days of service and sacrifice."x

Think also of the work of the churches in the making of the morale of the army. It is this which is worth so much toward winning. Let an army lose its "nerve" and it is beaten even before the battle begins. The most powerful morale is that brought about by a morality based upon the religion of Jesus Christ. Should you be asked to name the army most notable for its morale you could think of no other than that of Cromwell when he gained control of England. There has never been another army

x Extracts from a letter from the Commissioner of Internal Revenue.

with such morale. Neither has there been another so moral! The two made it irresistible. In their effort to increase the morale of our soldiers the churches are giving their best pastors and evangelists as chaplains, army Y. M. C. A. workers, and camp pastors to help them *live here* and prepare them for *life hereafter*.

Taking all into consideration, my conviction is that no other agencies have surpassed the churches in their loyalty to the government nor have made more valuable contributions toward winning the war. So well have they measured up to the demands made upon them that the mouth of many a former critic has been hushed. When the final victory is won—for win we must—no small part of the credit therefor will belong to the churches.

It now remains to discuss the effect on the churches of the present war. It would be silly to expect to pass through such a great crisis as this and come out as we went into it. When a metal is heated by strong fires not only does the molten mass take to itself new forms but there is a purifying process resulting in the elimination of dross. The hot fires of the present conflict have melted humanity to the point where things are being shaped anew. Shall there not also accompany it a beneficent purifying process? Humanity needs it. It must and will come. Do not the churches, too, stand in need of purifying and re-shaping? It will be better for them and for the world when this takes place. We are sure it shall come to pass.

To attempt to point out all the ways in which readjustments are to be brought about would be a presumption of which I am incapable. Even the things I think I see might be due to a distorted vision. And yet there are certain things which seem to me so plainly indicated by the signs of the times that I can but call attention to them.

First: In the unmasking of the hellish designs of Prussianism and the consequent discredit of German "kultur", have we not reason to hope for a cessation in the

attempts to thrust Prussianized theology down the throats of our churches? So short has been the time since a preacher could not hope to be called a "scholar" unless his writings bore the "made in Germany" trade mark that attention does not need to be called thereto. The seminary or university which refused to bow at the feet of Radical Criticism was considered much behind the times. The times seem to be slowing down enough to get back in the neighborhood of the theology which gave men faith in a personal God, confidence in the Bible, and a hope for the hereafter which made life here worth living. Biblical criticism, in its saner sense, has been most valuable in revealing to us the sure foundations of our faith and to increase our appreciation of the Book which through the ages has withstood the assaults of Satan and the attempts to destroy it by its enemies and by others who claimed to be its friends. It is the so-called "Higher Criticism", which is destructive rather than constructive, that is coming into the disrepute it deserves. When we consider its effects on the Germans themselves, how it has helped to make them capable of any kind of cruelty, we may well wish that this war shall set us free from such an incubus. This consummation so devoutly to be desired seems at hand. Even so, may it come quickly.

A second effect is that the present war promises to remove from the foes of the churches one of the most pernicious and destructive enemies against which they have ever waged warfare. John Barleycorn is being bid good-bye by even his best friends. It is true that not quite all his friends will openly admit that the end is so near. A few politicians, without hope for preferment to office through any decent method, are attempting to defeat nation-wide prohibition by claiming for whiskey a form of "states' rights" which even they deny to other forms of evil. But the distillers have beheld the handwriting on the wall and are turning to other trades. The breweries, whose business has been built up by the saloons,

also see the trend of affairs and are attempting, all too late for them, to secure such a divorce from whiskey as will release them from the penalty of their once most beloved partner. Should the war do nothing else but show the American people how whiskey has unfitted its men for the best service and how the continued beer-drinking of the Germans has helped to harden them into a brutality bad enough to make even the Turks blush at their atrocities, it would repay the churches for all they put into it.

Thirdly: The war is teaching the churches how to behave better toward one another. The disciples came to Jesus one day (expecting to be commended for their zeal) and said: "Teacher, we saw one casting out demons in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followed not us." The greatest harm from denominationalism has come from the tendency to act in like manner toward those who will not agree with us. But the Jesus way is quite different: "Forbid them not: for there is no man who shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us." Had this been kept in mind much ammunition that the churches have used in fighting one another might have been effectively used against the common enemy of all the churches. The war has greatly helped the churches to realize this. There is now a spirit of sympathy and co-operation never before known since the rise of denominationalism. Some even predict a speedy end to denominationalism. Having noted in history the beneficent effects of denominationalism, despite its defects, I cannot believe this would be best, nor do I see any indications of its coming to pass at an early date. Until we can all see eye to eye and believe and obey alike we can be more brotherly as we are than if all were forced into one organization, to confess belief in one certain creed, or to follow one form of worship. The days when efforts to centralize came nearest succeeding are those in which arose the most awful persecution and in which the disagreements grew

greatest. In America, where denominationalism has had free rein, where if a man did not like one church there was a different one opened to him, or if he did not like any he had the privilege of constituting one to suit himself, there has been less of religious persecution and more of friendly co-operation than in any other part of the world. Moreover, those who prate the loudest of church union are those most insistent that others must unite along the lines for which they themselves contend. It is better, as Abraham assured Lot, to draw apart and remain brethren than to live together in such a way as to foment fussing and encourage quarrels. Jesus prayed for *unity*, not union. We are getting nearer to that for which He prayed than has been true since the era inaugurated in the days of the Apostles. And the war has had much to do with it. For this unity we should pray and work. It means much, whereas that kind of union often advocated holds out little prospect for good but great possibilities for evil. But we needed to be taught to treat one another more like brethren. The war has taught us we could. Nor will its lesson soon be forgotten.

A fourth effect of this war is that it is bringing to the churches the greatest missionary opportunity known to our age. Should Russia alone be considered we could well believe this true. The toppling over of aristocracy has carried with it the hold of its hide-bound state church. Even the Jews are to have freedom to worship. A democratic people will be willing to turn from an autocratic church can they but be brought in contact with the democratic gospel of the Son of God. Woe unto them and to us if the churches of America fail to see and seize this God-given missionary opportunity. Then there is the increased opportunity in the East, especially among the Chinese. Some years ago the Chinese saw our government give back to them the indemnity paid for damage to our citizens. Desiring to know more of that religion which could make people act so differently from the accustomed

way of nations they sought to know more of our religion. The result was the addition of thousands of converts to the churches in China. Can it be different now when they see a great nation like ours, which might have continued to reap rich profits from the war, put its men and its money into the war not through any desire for conquest or indemnity but to protect those too weak to protect themselves? The American churches ought to be more ready than ever before to teach that religion which can make a nation act in so beneficent a manner. And then the land of our Lord! For more than a millennium it has been closed against Christian propaganda. But its occupation by the British assures freedom for preaching the gospel there in the future. With the turning again of the Jews to Palestine shall not we turn thither too? We should precede them with the message which will enable them to find the Lord in His holy hill when they reach it. In this same region we are seeing the war bring a division in that religion whose success has depended on the unity of its adherents. Moslemism can never again be the menace it has proven since the seventh century. Our eyes must be weak indeed if we fail to see in this division an opening for the entrance of the truth. Everywhere can be noted evidences of like import. With this war God has unlocked the door of the whole world to the churches willing to obey His command to give His gospel to the whole world. Shall we not enter every door which he opens to us?

One other effect being produced on the churches by the war, and to be felt even more in the unfolding future, must be considered. As we are going up against that which lays bare the fundamental needs of the human heart we are learning that there is only one sufficient remedy for all our woes. Perhaps the soldiers sometimes learned it first. Face to face with the real issues of life, often with but a few hours to live, they came to care not so much for theories of religion as for religion itself; not for sys-

tems of theology, but for God; not preachments about Christ, but Christ; not platitudes, but peace with God amid the strife among men. With the opening of the great offensives in the spring the papers will be read more closely than ever. Long lists in heavy black type will tell of the dead, wounded, and missing. Then hungry hearts will turn as never before to the churches for comfort. Wounded hearts will be brought bleeding into our congregations, our prayer meetings, our studies, our homes. Will our message help to heal? Think you not that the non-essentials, the unnecessary, will be thrown into the rubbish heap, and that we will deal with fundamentals? Had anything else been sufficient for the hurt of humanity God's Son need not, nor would, have come into the world to suffer and die. He was the only hope for the world when He came. He is its only Hope now. May the crucified and risen Christ become so vital in our thinking and so real in our experiences that our churches will be ready to respond to the coming call and able to aid the crushed souls who shall seek from the churches that which can never be found elsewhere.