

THE CONTINENT

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A Time for Prayer

A YEAR OF BAFFLEMENT—

Few would contradict that description of the year just closed.

Is the year just opening to be another of the same character?

The uncompleted peace is a symbol of the whole history of 1919. When the year came in no one dreamed that it would expire before the lately warring nations had concluded the terms on which they would try to maintain amity hereafter. Especially were all observers confident that 1919 would be the birth-year of a society of peoples pledged against future wars.

The total failure of these expectations is, however, no more disappointing than the collapse of other moral hopes which hailed the incoming year. Scarcely a single item has been realized out of all the optimistic confidence which counted on the period immediately following the war as a great period of human uplift.

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Men said, while the storm of war was still convulsing the world, that the lessons humanity was learning could not fail to work a spiritual revolution.

In detail it was predicted that when the struggle had ended the habit of self-sacrifice learned by both soldiers and civilians would be found the controlling note of all civil society; that the surge of idealism which fought the war through for righteousness' sake would permanently fix the hearts of men far above all sordid covetousness; that a passion for justice would eliminate sharp and selfish practice from both politics and business; that partisanship would be consumed in patriotism; that the animosities of the industrial world would be swallowed up in a sense of interdependence harmonizing capital and labor; that the mutual support and common bravery of black and white, native-born and foreign-born, on the field of battle would shame out of existence every remnant of racial prejudice; and especially that the sense of God that came to men so vividly in the trenches and on the battlefield would continue to hallow life and solemnize duty.

But it has not been so. Sacrifice has already been replaced by self-seeking in the case of the majority of men; the zeal for the common good which dominated all other motives in the pinch of war has lost its popularity; avarice and extravagance have more than reestablished their former sway; party contentions have become unprecedentedly childish; employers and workmen in their continuing disagreements are a great deal more stubborn and implacable than they were just in advance of the war period, and, worst of all, antipathy to the negro race, instead of being mollified by the superb fidelity of black soldiers in the European fighting, has grown more demoniac than ever experienced before.

And the church, standing for God and the compassionate "White Comrade," is no whit nearer to the soul of the average American than it was in advance of the great national trial.

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The single encouraging fact which on the face of things today may be marked as a fresh asset accruing from the war is this:

By what men showed themselves under stress of war, whether at home or at the front, has been demonstrated what they can be—what is actually within the character capacity of the ordinary man.

That alone gives the present moment of the world an aspect of optimism—but is not that enough to make despair a treason?

Mankind can be generous, self-forgetting, sacrificial, just, high-minded, gallant toward good comrades, willing to rejoice in the gains of others, unwilling to hold down either persons or peoples

in enforced inferiority, reverent toward God—ready, in short, for any service or any martyrdom that will count to human advantage or for divine righteousness.

Mankind can be all that; for one sacred year America was.

To that great demonstration but one answer is worthy of any servant of God or even of any true-hearted humanitarian:

All that men can be they must be.

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This resolve of itself, however, only fortifies the faithful against disheartenment. It does not teach how to achieve the purpose.

Here indeed the cloud of bafflement lies heaviest today. Everywhere men of the church are asking what will persuade the returned soldier and sailor to believe that the prayer which comforted and the unselfishness which inspired their lonely hours of peril by land and sea are just as indispensable to fit living still.

On all hands also thoughtful citizens concern themselves with unanswered speculation on what influence is to restore in American politics the worldwide view of service obligation and serving privilege that shaped the course of the nation while the fight was on.

Answers to these questions, not yet apparent, will not appear suddenly. The way ahead will not be revealed by celestial searchlights bursting through the cloud. It will be shown at length by some gradual dawning of understanding which must be waited for.

It does not therefore lie with men to decide whether the year just opening is to be another year of bafflement or an actually new year of new solutions and contenting results.

But men can—Christian men certainly—give to the year a character which is entirely within human disposal.

They can make 1920 a year of prayer.

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Prayer is applicable to every occasion. It serves the day of success with what is often its only defense against the mishaps that dog the heedless heels of self-satisfaction.

But the hour to which prayer by its very nature is supremely appropriate is the hour when nobody knows what to do next.

Then there is nothing else to do but pray.

And that is the case of Americans just now.

The wisdom of men is bankrupt on every matter entitled to be called in any distinctive way a problem of this special time.

In the state the repression of revolution, the consummation of peace, the forestalling of further war, the frustration of profiteering, the adjustment of a "modus vivendi" for industry, the maintenance of interracial justice, the adequate education and Americanization of the masses, the right measuring of the nation's international duty—not a conclusive word yet on one of these problems.

In the church, likewise, the attainment of Christian unity, the creation of a genuine spirit of brotherhood among struggling men in a competitive society, the installation of love as a dynamic sentiment toward the unhappy, degraded and despised, the cultivation of contrition for sin and of abhorrence for pretense, the reversal of men's dominant passion from getting to giving—these things superlatively needful, nobody quite knows how to effect.

Only one place in all the universe affords a deposit of wisdom that can be drawn on by the needy fearless of exhausting the resource or of having the draft rejected. The guidepost pointing the way to that treasury reads:

"If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God."

Let us pray.

returning have found their way into the churches. It is no reflection on the churches or their spirit, though some may deserve adverse judgment. It is rather the sharp contrast between the normal way of presenting the religious appeal and the way that had become familiar abroad. Deep down what happens in a church in America and what happened in a hut in the A. E. F. are the same thing, but anywhere above the deeper levels the two seem far apart both in substance and in method. It is no wonder that it takes a while to align the two in one's thinking. Here then the church has a large chance of service; it can conceive its task to be an outgoing one rather than merely an inviting one. The Christian faith has shown itself easily portable, fluid enough to fit into unusual conditions and firm enough to retain its qualities under any conditions. The church need not fear bad results from flinging its message out anywhere and by any means. Its larger danger is in binding it to fixed places and methods, holding all others in suspicion.

Another contrast between the religious method there and here is in the unity given it there over against the divisions that mark it here. Nothing occurred overseas to keep a man from being just what he felt he ought to be in the matter of differences from his fellows. On a Paris boulevard some one asked a colonel what he was, religiously, back in the States. "Just what I am here," he replied, "a Baptist." That was easy enough; but he had just come from a church where the preacher had been far from a Baptist in his peculiarities, and the colonel had not thought to consider any such question about him. Nothing hindered thoughtful men from talking over and acting on their differences, but something did hinder magnifying them so that they should divide the forces. Only the Romanists had to develop their own centers of religious work. Protestants made abundant room for each other—and always for the Romanists too, when they wanted room.

When men were facing the grimmer realities and needed undergirding, it was the phase of a man's faith that was vital and essential that came to mind. That did not exclude elements on which Christians divide, but it required they should be presented in a vital and not an antagonistic way. And when they are worded so, few Christians find them divisive. No proposal is worth considering, to be sure, which suggests keeping the overseas spirit alive by surrender of conviction. No man was worth sending to a group of soldiers if he did not have strong convictions. The impossible thing was to put his conviction in terms that ruled out his fellow workers. Services that denounce the faith of fellow Christians may contain much truth, but they are headed in the wrong direction to maintain the overseas spirit.

But it must not be supposed that the church only is concerned to keep that great spirit alive. The nation is as deeply concerned. But it cannot be done by the nation by doling out to returning men favors, offices, land, bonuses and the like. Those who crave such things have already begun to lose their spirit. Both church and nation must keep outermost a call to the demanding task. Most of the men who went into the struggle meant to see it through; they can be shown that they have not yet seen it through. If it was a struggle for the safety and better life of the world, and if America is part of that world, then the struggle is still on.

Some of our public men have settled back to the old narrowness, and if they have their way we shall soon be as though there had been no war. In that case we may as well lose the high spirit which most of these narrower men have neither themselves had nor recognized in others. The America of which they speak is not challenging nor demanding. It is easy, and it will take care of itself. But the America of which men dreamed and for which they hoped in those years overseas, the America that bears world burdens and never shrinks even when it

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Who Is "The Live Man"?

BY FREDERICK F. SHANNON

WE SPEAK most familiarly today of "the live man." What do we mean? Do we not merely mean the man who is alert, efficient, active, energetic? We say of such a man: "He's a live wire." But just wherein is he alive? And how much of him is alive? And toward what is he alive? And for what purpose is he alive? It is when we begin to answer these heart searching questions that our hearts shrink within us.

To put it bluntly: Does not our popular phrase mean that this so called live man is alive only on the lower, sensual side of his being? How much time does he devote to the Bible, to prayer, to meditation, to true worship? Why the very questions provoke either an impatience or an apology equivalent to a sodden confession of the tragic wrongness, the sheer emptiness of much of our present day living.

No, my friends, to be alive does not signify brain energy or social cleverness or commercial supremacy or physical strenuousness. A live wire may be all these and still be nothing more than a live wire. In my walk across the Brooklyn bridge one Sunday morning I passed two men. I never saw them before; I may never see them again. One was a splendid specimen of physical manhood; the other was a stooped hunchback. Which was really the vital man? That all depends. For aught I know; that athletic looking man may be wide open on every side of his nature. But if he is just a live wire and nothing more; and if, on the other hand, the withered, crippled man is a disciple of Christ, and walks with God why your athlete will stumble down to "dusty death," while your lame man, cured of his lameness, will walk on through green valleys of eternal love. Was not Paul weak in bodily presence? Yet he had such spiritual puissance—a wrestling genius that is compounded of the

stuff of eternity—that he overthrew the world, the flesh, the devil and the Roman empire to boot!

To be made alive in Christ, then, is God's only way of bringing out all the fine, rich humanness within us. For God's most excellent penmanship is not and cannot be "in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh." Thus Paul, in insisting that God's papyrus must be hearts of flesh, is simply bringing the universe up to date. For the goal of God's quest, the movement of world and dawn of epochs, is to produce the new human, personality that will wear on when stars are worn out. And no man can be truly humanized until he is thoroughly Christianized.

Just this, I take it, is the clear import of that very memorable confession of Drummond's. Recalling the men who woke him up, he tells us that Ruskin taught him to use his eyes; that Emerson taught him to see with his mind; that Channing taught him to believe in God; that Robertson of Brighton taught him that God was human. Yet all of them together could not teach Drummond the art of living. Passing by all transcripts, however opulent and luminous, he sought out original sources for himself. And, behold, he learned life from Christ, in Christ, through Christ, and Christ only! Borrowing the words of Henry Ward Beecher, Drummond says: "My hidden ideals of what is beautiful I have drawn from Christ. My thoughts of what is manly and noble and pure have, almost all of them, arisen from the Lord Jesus Christ."

That is the only recipe God has for the truly live man.

—This world is full of joy for one who will look for it; no one is so blind as he who walks on "acres of diamonds" without seeing a single gleam.

God With Us

BY CHARLES LEMUEL THOMPSON

Once when the world was young, dear God,
Thy steps were with us here—
One day in the shade of a garden fair,
Again on a Sinai drear.

But now the arts of a doubting world
Have dimmed the reality vast,
Where once men saw their God, now but
A tremulous shadow is cast.

So a weary world is calling now
For the God that used to be,
Who walked with men in a furnace fierce
Or commanded a stormy sea.

Again the furnace is open wide,
It burns with a seven-fold heat;
And what if thou walk not with us there,
Thou Man of the pierced feet!

Come back, thou God of the martyr band,
Who walked with them in the flame;
In days without thee are we worthy to be
Confessors with them of thy name?

Oh, "the boys" in the crumbling trenches
reeled
Back only to fall in thine arms—
Not a far away God but an awful friend,
Robing death in its ultimate charms.

Ah! Thus in a world full of sorrow and pain
Could we see thee, great Brother and
Friend,
The levellest day were ecstatic, indeed,
The wildest were peace without end.

Come back from the dimness of ages far,
From the heights Olympic and stern;
With us walk on the lonely Emmaus road,
Our hearts then, dear Master, will burn.