

The Cost of War

The time of the coming of "The Prince of Peace" seems an appropriate occasion for calling attention to the vast sums of money used each year to build navies and equip armies, which might yield infinitely better results if applied to better ends. The expense of an actual war in money and in human life is frightful. In the first Balkan war Bulgaria lost 80,000 out of 350,000 men with an expenditure of 240 million dollars. Greece lost 10,000 out of 150,000 men and the expenses were 50 million dollars. Servia sent 250,000 men to war and 30,000 were killed; she spent 124 million dollars. Montenegro furnished 30,000 soldiers of whom 8,000 were sacrificed with 3 million dollars spent. Turkey lost 100,000 men out of 450,000 and the loss in money amounted to 322 million dollars. If figures can make any impression at all, surely taxpayers ought to ask whether they are getting an adequate return for their money. It has been pointed out that if the mutual suspicion and distrust which permits the present huge armaments with their galling financial burdens are justified by facts, civilization is a thin veneer and we are still savages at heart. What we should strive to do is to influence the people in such a way as would lead to their being governed by reason instead of fears, so that the present tension might be relieved. It is an awful sarcasm to speak of the nations that possess such armaments as "Christian nations."

The Grace of God

It is always helpful to have a fresh statement of familiar truth, and a recent utterance on the subject of Divine grace seems particularly worthy of notice:—

The Gospel is grace, it is God in life, Deity in overflow. Grace is God in the act and process of imparting His own life to men, perfecting nature in Spirit, crowning evolution in salvation. All that is objective in religion resolves itself into grace, and all that is subjective into faith.

These words go to the very heart of the Christian Gospel, for assuredly "all that is objective resolves itself into grace and all that is subjective into faith." This means that everything in religion is to be measured by its relation to the grace of God. All means, methods, instruments, and functions are secondary to the supreme reality of the grace of God as the Divine act in, on, and through man. No wonder that the speaker of these words says that for every preacher who has eyes to see and ears to hear this is a glorious time to be alive, when the Gospel of the grace of God is again in flood, clear as crystal. When a man experiences in his heart, and proclaims out of a full life the unsearchable riches of the grace of God, he knows, and other people know as well, something of what St. Paul meant when he said: "By the grace of God I am what I am."

The King's Testimony

An interesting little incident was related recently by the vicar of Dersingham, Norfolk, England. He said that in the ancient churchyard of Dersingham, which forms part of the Royal Sandringham estate, there is an old tomb with this inscription: "Live as you hope to die." The other day King George was walking through the churchyard, when he noticed the inscription, and remarked, "That is a very good motto to have." In this connection attention may be called to the new edition of that fine booklet, "The Sinner's Friend," with the touching incident given in it of King Edward's reading of it just before his death. These two testimonies to the power of the Gospel are eminently worthy of note.

The Great Sign

Centuries before the Birth of our Lord prophecy foretold His supernatural entrance into the world and described it as a sign from above. "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel." (Isa. vii. 14). This declaration reminds us of the words of Simeon to the mother of our Lord, "Behold this Child is set for a sign which shall be spoken against." (Luke ii. 34). There is scarcely any article of the Christian Faith that is being more spoken against to-day than the Virgin-Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The only other article associated with this in regard to intense opposition is the Resurrection; the one referring to the supernatural entrance into the world and the other the supernatural departure. There must be some real reason for this opposition, since the foes of the Gospel usually concentrate upon what may be regarded as strategic positions. Nor is it very difficult to discover ample reasons for the intense hostility shown to the doctrines of the Virgin-Birth and the Resurrection. Let us think now of the former, though all that is said is practically true of the latter also.

The Virgin-Birth stands for the fundamental principle of supernaturalism. The main conflict of to-day is against the proper recognition of God. An attempt is being made to explain everything in religion within rational and human elements. All the phenomena of the spiritual life must be explained in terms of natural development. In opposition to and contradiction of this, the New Testament begins with a Divine miracle in the Birth of its Founder. While He comes out of our human race He comes through a supernatural generation. God thereby intended to show that the method of redemption which He was about to inaugurate must be Divine in its source and power. Nowadays we are invited to accept the theory of evolution as the explanation of all the moral and religious developments of the ages. Certain forms of criticism will not allow that Israel's religion had anything unique and supernatural about it, while the attention now being given to what is known as Comparative Religion invariably indicates the desire and endeavour to account for Christianity as suggested by and associated with other religious faiths. But in answer to this stands the Virgin-Birth. Instead of a modern philosophy which teaches a Divine Immanence in creation and will only allow such an Immanence in Christ as we find in nature and man, the Gospel substitutes a Divine Incarnation in the Person of Christ. It refuses to substitute ideas for facts, and to dissipate the historic personality of the Lord Jesus merely in ideas which are to have for us the value of God. Of course, it would be easy to surrender the Virgin-Birth if there had been no Incarnation and no historical revelation of God in Christ, but the moment we grant the historical appearance, at a particular period, of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Redeemer, it is clear that no purely natural and human considerations, and certainly no mere ideas, will account for Him. It is an unquestioned historical fact that from the first century whenever there has been a denial of the Virgin-Birth, a rejection of the Incarnation itself has usually followed.

Not only are we faced with objections to a supernatural Christ, but we are also met with equally strong objections to a supernatural Christianity. Man demands a religion of naturalism, one that shall be only a process of education and a development of human nature

which will accomplish by its own powers all that can be demanded or expected. In direct opposition to this view the supernatural Birth of Jesus Christ implies and involves the supernatural birth of every follower of His. And when our Lord said, "Ye must be born again," it was His way of reminding us that the old race in Adam had failed, and that a new race, born from above, as Christ Himself was born, must take its place. It is also at this point that the truths connected with the Virgin-Birth cut across the prevalence of belief in a doctrine of evolution. Whatever may be said of this doctrine in the spheres of natural and mental science, we are still without proof that morality can be accounted for by it, and especially that human self-consciousness and self-determination are explicable thereby. This is the problem that the profoundest philosophers cannot solve, and this is the reason why human wisdom is proclaiming its belief in some great Superman under whose leadership the race is to realize its complete ideals. But the hope is vain and the outcome will be seen before long; indeed, it is already being seen in the powerlessness of human nature, considered alone, to realize its true moral and spiritual life apart from Divine grace. And it will always be a disastrous and fatal mistake if the followers of Jesus Christ endeavour to combine the wisdom of the world with the simplicity of the pure Gospel. Just as our Lord was "despised and rejected of men" and went alone in the narrow pathway of the Divine will to found His Kingdom and to fulfil the Divine purposes, so believers must never tolerate anything that would tend to bridge over the unfathomable gulf between the natural and supernatural. Neither Jesus Christ nor His Gospel can be explained in terms of evolution; the records of His life and extraordinary influence disprove the theory in His case, and every conversion and all true Christian progress equally disprove the theory in the case of His followers. Only by a Divine intervention can we account for the Man Christ Jesus, and only by an equally Divine interposition can we account for the salvation of even one single soul.

Let us, then, encourage ourselves once more in the Divine realities associated with Christmas; the Incarnation of God in Christ, the manifestation of "the Word made flesh." Whether we think of the historical records in the Gospels or the universal belief of the Church in all ages, we are compelled to recognize the uniqueness of our Lord's entrance into the world as well as the uniqueness of His earthly life, His death, and resurrection. Is it not significant that Wellhausen, who is known as the master of the critical school of the Old Testament, has now turned his attention to the New Testament, and has written commentaries on St. Matthew and St. Luke, commencing with the third chapter in each case without saying a word as to the earlier chapters, or his reasons for not dealing with them? Why should these have been simply ignored? Is this scientific or scholarly? Surely the meaning is evident; the silence proceeds from bias against the supernatural Birth recorded in these chapters. But no other adequate explanation is available, either of Christ or of Christianity. Supernaturalism continues to hold the field as accounting for both. Every effect must have its adequate cause, and just as the life of Christ finds no other explanation than that of the Virgin-Birth, so far as His earthly origin is concerned, so the existence of individual Christians and the Christian Church cannot be explained otherwise than through the new birth, the spiritual life from above. Let us, therefore, rejoice in this Divine "sign," and let us not shrink from following our Leader

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