

The whole thing falls to the ground ; and if we do not compose poems about typhoid it is because typhoid does not attract us and war does. That is the bottom

“SIR,—I see that ‘The Church’s Duty in regard to War’ is to be discussed at the Church Congress. This is right. For a year the heads of our Church have been telling us what war is and does—that it is a school of character ; that it sobers men, cleans them, strengthens them, knits their hearts ; makes them brave, patient, humble, tender, prone to self-sacrifice. Watered by ‘war’s red rain,’ one Bishop tells us, virtue grows ; a cannonade, he points out, is an ‘oratorio’—almost a form of worship. True ; and to the Church men look for help to save their souls from starving for lack of this good school, this kindly rain, this sacred music. Congresses are apt to lose themselves in wastes of words. This one must not, surely cannot, so straight is the way to the goal. It has simply to draft and submit a new Collect for war in our time, and to call for the reverent but firm emendation, in the spirit of the best modern thought, of those passages in Bible and Prayer-Book by which even the truest of Christians and the best of men have at times been blinded to the duty of seeking war and ensuing it. Still, man’s moral nature cannot, I admit, live by war alone ; nor do I say with some that peace is wholly bad. Even amid the horrors of peace you will find little shoots of character fed by the gentle and timely rains of plague and famine, tempest and fire ; simple lessons of patience and courage conned in the schools of typhus, gout, and stone ; not oratorios, perhaps, but homely anthems and rude hymns played on knife and probe in the long winter nights. Far from me to ‘sin our mercies,’ or to call mere twilight dark. Yet dark it may become ; for remember that even these poor makeshift schools of character, these second-bests, these halting substitutes for war—remember that the efficiency of every one of them, be it hunger, accident, ignorance, sickness, or pain, is menaced by the intolerable strain of its struggles with secular doctors, plumbers, inventors, schoolmasters, and policemen. Every year thousands who would once have been braced and steeled by manly tussles with small-pox or diphtheria are robbed of that blessing by the great changes made in our drains. Every year thousands of women and children must go their way bereft of the rich spiritual experience of the widow and the orphan.”