

Belgians, without difference of party, or of condition, or of origin, rise up as one man, close ranged about their own King and their own Government, and cried to the invader: "Thou shalt not go through!"

At once, instantly, we were conscious of our own patriotism. For down within us all is something deeper than personal interests, than personal kinships, than party feeling, and this is the need and the will to devote ourselves to that more general interest which Rome termed the public thing, *Res publica*. And this profound will within us is Patriotism.

Our country is not a mere concourse of persons or of families inhabiting the same soil, having amongst themselves relations, more or less intimate, of business, of neighborhood, of a community of memories, happy or unhappy. Not so; it is an association of living souls subject to a social organization to be defended and safe guarded at all costs, even the cost of blood, under the leadership of those presiding over its fortunes. And it is because of this general spirit that the people of a country live a common life in the present, through the past, through the aspirations, the hopes, the confidence in a life to come, which they share together. Patriotism, an internal principle of order and of unity, an organic bond of the members of a nation, was placed by the finest thinkers of Greece and Rome at the head of the natural virtues. Aristotle, the prince of the philosophers of antiquity, held disinterested service of the city—that is, the State—to be the very ideal of human duty. And the religion of Christ makes of patriotism a positive law; there is no perfect Christian who is not also a perfect patriot. For our religion exalts the antique ideal, showing it to be realizable only in the Absolute. Whence, in truth, comes this universal, this irresistible impulse which carries at once the will of the whole nation in one single effort of cohesion and of insistence in face of the hostile menace against her unity and her freedom? Whence comes it that in an hour all interests were merged in the interest of all, and that all lives were together offered in willing immolation? Not that the State is worth more, essentially, than the individual or the family, seeing that the good of the family and of the individual is the cause and reason of the organization of the State. Not that our country is a Moloch on whose altar lives may lawfully be sacrificed. The rigidity of antique morals and the despotism of the Cæsars suggested the false principle—and modern militarism tends to revive it that the State is omnipotent, and that the discretionary power of the State is the rule of Right. Not so, replies Christian theology; Right is Peace—that is the interior order of a nation, founded upon Justice. And Justice itself is absolute only because it formulates the essential relation of man with God and of man with man. Moreover, war for the sake of war is a crime. War is justifiable only if it is the necessary means for securing peace. St. Augustine has said: "Peace must not be a preparation for war; and war is not be made except for the attainment of peace." In the light of this teaching, which is repeated by St. Thomas Aquinas, Patriotism is seen in its religious character. Family interests, class interests, party interests, and the material good of the individual take their place, in the scale of values, below the ideal of Patriotism, for that ideal is Right, which is absolute. Furthermore, that ideal is the public recognition of Right in national matters, and of national honour. Now there is no Absolute except God. God alone, by His sanctity and His sovereignty, dominates all human interests and human wills. And to affirm the absolute necessity of the subordination of all things to Right, to Justice, and to Truth, is implicitly to affirm God.

When, therefore, humble soldiers whose heroism we praise answer us with characteristic simplicity, "We only did our duty," or "We were bound in honor," they express the religious character of their Patriotism. Each of us does not feel that Patriotism is a sacred thing, and that a violation of national dignity is in a manner a profanation and a sacrilege.

THE REWARD OF THE SLAIN

I was asked lately by a Staff officer whether a soldier falling in a righteous cause—and our cause is such, to demonstration—is not veritably a martyr. Well, he is not a martyr in the rigorous theological meaning of the word, inasmuch as he dies in arms, whereas the martyr delivers himself, undefended and unarmed, into the hands of the executioner. But if I am asked what I think of the eternal salvation of a brave man who has consciously given his life in defence of his country's honour, and in vindication of violated justice, I shall not hesitate to reply that without any doubt whatever Christ crowns his military valour, and that death, accepted in this Christian spirit, assures the safety of that man's soul. "Greater love than this no man hath," said our Saviour, "that a man lay down his life for his friends." And the soldier who dies to save his brothers, and to defend the hearths and altars of his country, reaches this highest of all degrees of charity. He may not have made a close analysis of the value of his sacrifice; but must we suppose that God requires of the plain soldier in the excitement of battle the methodical precision of the moralist or the theologian? Can we who revere his heroism doubt that his God welcomes him with love?

Christian mothers, be proud of your sons. Of all griefs, of all our human sorrows, yours is perhaps the most worthy of veneration. I think I behold you in your affliction, but erect, standing at the side of the Mother of Sorrows, at the foot of the Cross. Suffer us to offer you not only our condolence but our congratulation. Not all our heroes obtain military honours, but for all we expect the immortal crown of the elect. For this is the virtue of a single act of perfect charity: it cancels a whole lifetime of sins. It transforms a sinful man into a saint. Assuredly a great and a Christian comfort is the thought that not only amongst our own men, but in any belligerent army whatsoever, all who in good faith submit to the discipline of their leaders in the service of a cause they believe to be righteous, are sharers in the eternal reward of the soldier's sacrifice. And how many there not be amongst these young men of twenty who, had they survived, might possibly have had the resolution to live altogether well, and yet in the impulse of patriotism had the resolution to die so well?

Is it not true, my brethren, that God has the supreme art of mingling His mercy with His wisdom and His justice? And shall we not acknowledge that if war is a scourge for this earthly life of ours a scourge whereof we cannot easily estimate the destructive force and the