

# The War of the Great Day of God

By the Rt. Rev. CHARLES H. BRENT, D.D. —REV. xvi. 14.

A sermon preached by Bishop Brent at the inauguration of the Union Church of Manila, composed of the Presbyterian and Methodist English-speaking congregations, Sunday, October 11, 1914.

A GREAT and good man was once traveling in an English railway carriage. A religious fanatic, young, it is needless to say, sitting opposite, eyed him for a while. Then leaning forward he said to his senior: "Brother, have you found peace?" "No," was the prompt and emphatic reply, "I have found war."

To-day your hearts and minds are filled with joy and peace as you reach the consummation of your long-cherished hopes and plans for unity. It would be an unbecoming and ungrateful thing for me upon whom you have bestowed the privilege of addressing you on this important occasion, were I to strike wilfully a jarring or unsympathetic note. Yet I would be untrue to my trust if I were to do less than speak the full truth as I understand it. So I have chosen as the starting point of my message to you a striking phrase, full of awe and splendour. If for a moment I have lifted it from its grim setting it is only that you may more clearly discover the meaning of the full context of which it is the keystone. The optimist is a man who wrenches brilliant truths from the stern defences of their setting; the pessimist is a man who flings away the gem and clutches to his bosom the thorny frame; the Christian is a man who estimates both gem and setting at their full worth.

Let me read you the whole passage in which the words of the text are enshrined: "They are spirits of devils, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.) And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon."

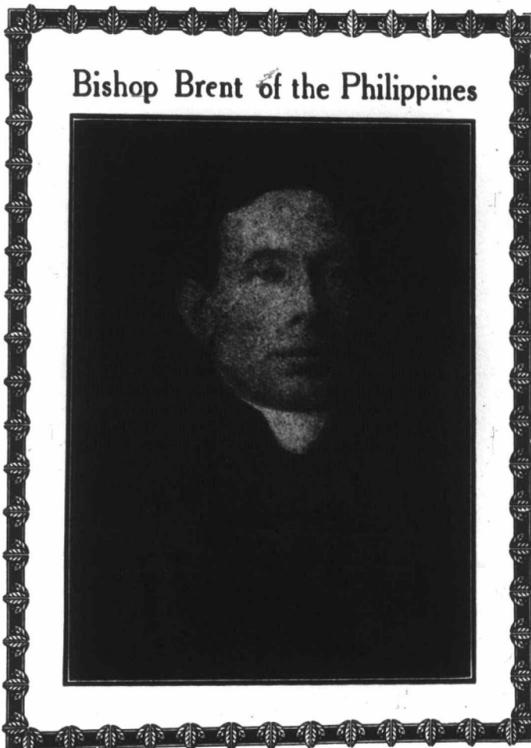
It is at moments of history like the present when the Revelation of St. John the Divine becomes intelligible and a source of comfort and inspiration. To anyone who has tried to live, this book is not without rich meanings. Indeed it is an unveiling, for such is the meaning of "apocalypse" or "revelation." It opens up the deep things of life. In it there are always two elements, as illustrated by this passage which I am quoting. There is the weird, ghastly, terrible, and the comely, noble, inspiring. They are always in close juxtaposition. You are swung rapidly from one to the other. The simple truth that is conveyed by the whole imagery is that for him who knows Christ the route to the best is by way of the worst. It is significant and instructive that the two characters, both of them well experienced in dark and dreadful disciplines, who have most successfully touched the heights of the sublime and stung men to fresh vision, are St. John the Divine and Dante. But they have done it only after painting with fearless and unsparing brush all that is terrible.

So it is that the words I have taken for a text on this day of hope and gladness blaze forth from a grim setting like a tongue of fire in the night. In language that is startling and revolting we are told of the wrath of God being poured out on the earth in seven plagues—or swift blows, for "plague" is but the Greek word for "blow." Things good in themselves become as poison—the earth is filled with ulcers, the sea is stagnant with blood, as are the majestic rivers and the merry little streams that streak the valleys, the blessed fertilizing sun becomes a destroying furnace, the air vomits lightnings, and the family of men gather for war. Yet this is the Great Day of God the Almighty.

The picture is of an existing situation. It is of a civilization without God, the life-giving, the preservative, the progressive Element, and of the fate of such a civilization—self-destruction. But in the very ruins God's war for a truer civilization begins. His trumpets summon men to join with Him to usher in a Great Day. It is not that men think that they are without God in the world. On the contrary, they pride themselves on their civilization being Christian. But the trouble has been, God has been put second instead of first. We have tried to perform that impossible

feat—marry God and the world-power or "beast." The world convulsion of to-day does not leave us outside of its upheaval. It is one of those swift visitations that come as a thief in the night and reveal our nakedness. It unveils us personally, industrially, socially, nationally, ecclesiastically. But to him that watcheth it is the blessed and great day of God—with a call to war.

The unveiling which Har-Magedon has already accomplished is well-stated in the words of one of my correspondents, a subject of one of the belligerent monarchs: "We are all very sad at the outbreak of the war—some of us at the proud boasting of our being free from blame and at the inability to see that we are not blameless because of our worship of the golden calf. That, with the same kind of worship offered to the same idol [our chief foe] for the past 20 years or more, is to blame, it seems to me."



Bishop Brent of the Philippines

The churches can say but little. Have they not been constantly at war with one another for centuries, with seldom a truce even? We are a kingdom divided against itself, and we have fallen. This war would have been an impossibility had the Church been one. If war is an evil in national life, it is a thousand-fold greater evil in Church life. Humbled and awakened the churches must renew their search for peace and unity according to God's will. But how?

1. Not by slurring over honest differences or by slighting convictions. There is one thing worse than war—saying peace, peace, where there is no peace. Twice that great statesman, Jeremiah, speaking of God's judgment on evil, counts the hurt of my people lightly; saying, Peace, where there is no peace. And Ezekiel likewise announces God's visitation on the prophets "because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace."

To create the appearance and use the name peace when there is no peace is insincerity, foolishness, a sand foundation. War is at least honest in its hates and rivalries.

2. Not for economic reasons. I have heard business men at home agree that the churches must get together in the Mission field, because of waste of money; if there were unity we should be able to do so much more with the money available. To plead this as a cause—it might be a convenient result—of unity is but a refined phase of the worship of the golden calf. Truth is al-

ways costly, and it were better far to be loyal to conviction in magnanimous separation than to heed such an argument for unity. We cannot come together for reasons of commercial saving.

3. Not for the sake of ease and convenience. Though I stand for and believe in peace, and wear the badge of the Peace Society, I am not an advocate of peace that has as its goal and motive ease, and the love of ease. There are those who in self-indulgence, disliking the austere and difficult, long for peace as a means of gratifying their indulgence. Peace, if I understand its meaning, has no room in its mansions for the idle or the cowardly. The demands of peace are more exacting than those of war. When we pass from war to peace we pass from compulsory to volitional effort, from necessity to choice. Because we forget this, peace falls into disrepute. The forces of evil are organized and active frequently when those of righteousness are lolling in slippered ease.

There were those among the abolitionists who after the Civil War folded their hands in smug satisfaction. The victory was won. True. But victory won is always a starting point for higher achievement if the victory is to live as a permanent force. The result of indolent peace after the Civil War was that the freedman in some respects was worse off than ever. Such men as General Howard and General Armstrong saved the situation so far as it was saved. The establishment of peace was for them the signal for a "war of the great day of God." "There is something in this standing face to face with destiny," says General Armstrong, "looking into the darkness, that is inspiring; it appeals to manhood; it is thrilling like going into action." He interprets the duties of peace in terms of war. "The day-time of our labour for the freed people is short. The North has not as yet done its full duty in this matter. . . . The education of the freedman is the great work of the day; it is their only hope, the only power that can lift them up as a people, and I think every encouragement should be given to schools established for their benefit." Later, when he found how grave his peace-war was, he said with that delicious humour that was his: "It remains to make the best of things. Those who are hopeless disarm themselves, and may as well go to the rear; men and women of faith, optimists, to the front. This is the Christian era. 'In hoc signo vinces' is the motto of the faithful, they are not afraid. But mere optimism is stupid; sanctified commonsense is the force that counts. Work for God and man is full of detail. It needs organization, requires subordination, sometimes painful holding of the tongue; gabble and gossip, even that of the pious, is one of the most fatal devices of the evil one; the friction and fuss in God's army does much to defeat it. Many people are good, but good for nothing. Working together is as important as working at all."

No one has more reason than the Christian to believe in the necessity of peace with tension. One of England's most accomplished philosophers, Mr. Bosanquet, holding the view that God is a "weary Titan" needing man's vigorous co-operation, maintains that "there is no satisfaction without tension. The celestial city has its problems. The object of the soul's quest is not happiness, but as Carlyle told his generation so often, blessedness."

The true motive for peace and unity is set forth in our Lord's profound prayer as recorded in St. John 17: "That the world may believe that Thou didst send me." It is a necessity for the knowledge of God, which is life eternal, blessedness, that for which man was made.

I have watched with interest and sympathy your brave and conscientious effort toward local unity. Though I differ from you strongly in certain matters pertaining both to faith and order, I differ from you in a constructive and not a controversial spirit. Organic unity between your respective communions and my own is not possible now, but there is a unity of the spirit in the bond of peace upon which I fall back even when it is necessary to emphasize differences.

You have met and braved no small difficulties in the course of your negotiations between church and church. Two particularly stand out in relief. First, you have done in a particular instance what your churches in their completeness have as yet been unable to do. You have achieved local organic unity. It is surely the first and simplest step toward wider unity, that like-minded communions, which have no deep difference in matters of faith and order, should unite. It would appear to be logic to maintain that what local congregations can do, the whole churches