

# THE PEACE OF GOD

By the Most Rev. The Archbishop of Canterbury

(The Following is the Full Text of the Sermon Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday, January 3 (the Day of National Intercession) by the Archbishop of Canterbury.)

*"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*—PHIL. iv. 7.

A STRANGE text, some one may say, to choose at such a moment. We meet in the largest church of the British Empire, at the central pivot of its throbbing life, on the first Sunday of what must be a memorable year, a day which we have specially set apart for thoughts and prayers about what is happening in Europe. What is it that is happening? A war greater in area and scale, and more fearful in carnage, than any that has ever been seen since life on the round world began. Five months—no more—have passed since the first gun was fired, and already the list of men who were strong, healthy, capable, keen, five short months ago, and who are now stark in death outnumbers anything of its kind in human history. And to reckon up the load of sheer blank sorrow in innumerable homes, and the actual but incidental war sufferings, short of death or possibly worse than death, would baffle the power of any man. Put thus bluntly, it is all horrible beyond words. And to ignore or belittle its horribleness—its blackness—is to falsify plain facts. And yet, facing it all, I take deliberately my text, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus," and I maintain that if we note how these words find their place in St. Paul's letter we shall see their absolute fitness to our thoughts to-day. They are the words, remember, of a manacled prisoner, broken in body, and lying in peril of death. What he says is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say rejoice. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious, but in everything"—here comes our Intercession Day—"in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And then, because of that, and through that, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep" (literally shall "guard" or "garrison") "your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

## EVILS TO BE GUARDED AGAINST.

If our Intercession Day is used aright, this—in the very midst of all the fearful and gruesome warring and death—must be the outcome. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding." It does "pass understanding." You cannot express it easily in terms of common talk. But, understood or not, it is there, or it can be there, and it will keep—will "guard" and "garrison"—your heart and mind against the evils, the horrors, which such a time might readily, perhaps naturally, bring. That surely is exactly our purpose and our hope in these prayers to-day. Consider with me for a few minutes what are the things from which heart and mind will thus be guarded by what that chained prisoner calls "the peace of God."

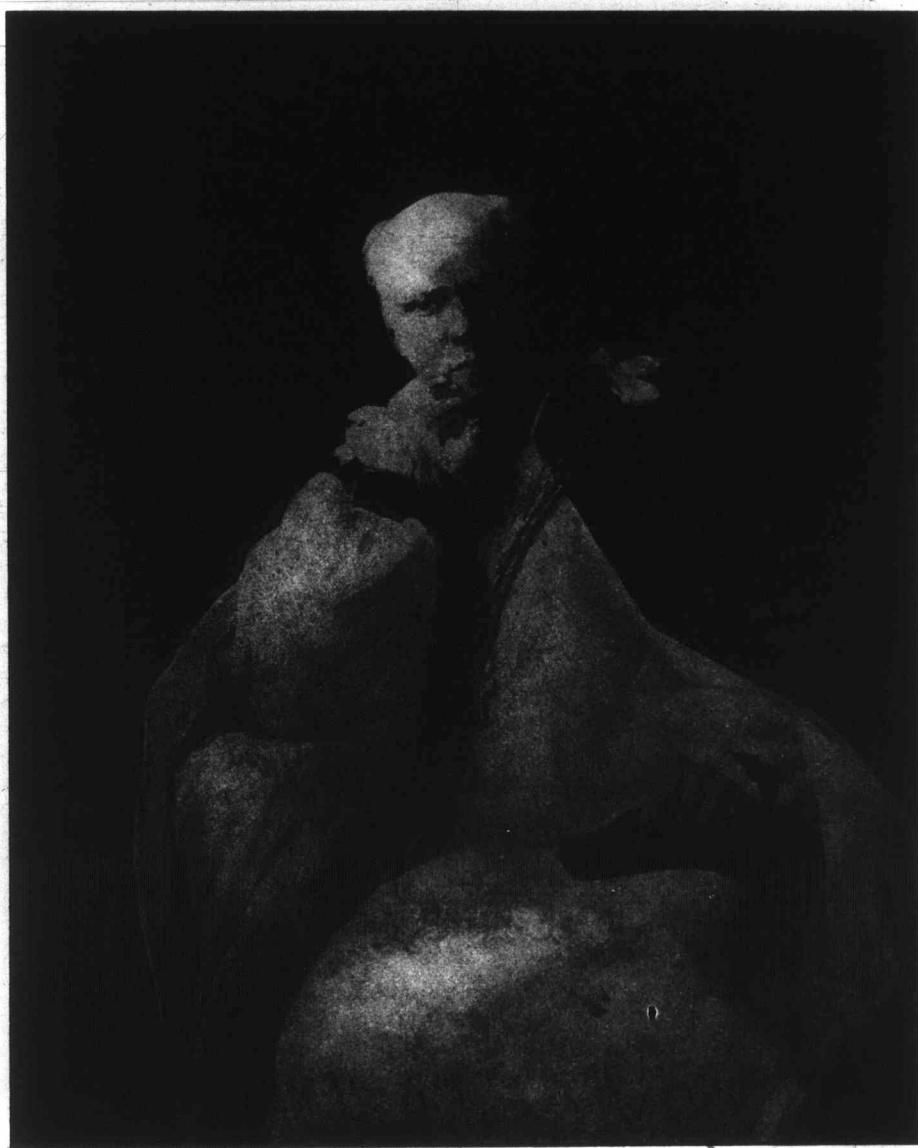
## FRIGHT OR PANIC.

First of all there is simple fright or panic. The people who in hours of inevitable stress and danger are, as experience shows, least apt to give way to sheer helpless fright are those whose courage rests upon some definite faith, not on mere buoyancy or high spirit. They are the people whose trust in the care and guidance of our Father, however simple and even childlike it be, is also thoughtful and deliberate. About that fact there is not, I think, any doubt. It would be easy to give examples. It so happens that in modern English history at home we have little or no experience of anything which would give occasion to widespread fear among us civil folk in our own country. But records of Indian Mutiny days, or of some vast accident or catastrophe by sea or land, have proved abundantly who are those who can best at such an hour be

trusted. I do not underrate the nerve and coolness of hundreds of men and women who would claim no religious basis for their courage, but the power which belongs to or emerges from a thoughtful, definite religious trustfulness has been proved a thousand times, from the days of the bloodstained Coliseum to these days of the shrapnelled trenches of the Aisne or the trampled banks of the Vistula.

## THE TRUE COURAGE.

A few weeks ago a powerful writer drew for us a picture of what he called "the two kinds of courage." There is one kind which, whatever its vigour, is in no wise thoughtful. It may be the animal courage of the savage, or it may be a



The Canadian Churchman.

In this time of National Crisis, this picture of the Archbishop of Canterbury, wearing the robes worn by him at the Coronation of the present King, will be of interest.

blind obedience to inexorable discipline. Quite other is the courage of will and conscience, the courage of those who fight or endure because of what their own souls definitely value, something which they are resolved shall be maintained among men. "Faith and courage," he says, "go together, and the higher the faith the higher the courage." Now, that is the sort of courage which comes from what St. Paul calls "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." It has a basis or background of assured trust, and it looks outward and onward to the fulfilment of a high and sacred purpose. That "peace of God" is akin to love; it "casteth out fear, because fear hath torment." And that sort of courage is not for the trenches or the sea-swept decks alone or even chiefly. We have seen, we are daily seeing, it at its noblest in the firm, bright face of mother, or elder sister, or young wife, self-controlled and keen, with the background of anxious stress or poignant sorrow behind the smile, but with the "peace which passeth understanding" irradiating the patient home-life or the multiplied activities outside. Yes, there is in that peace an illimitable power to keep, to "guard," the soul from cowardice, to comfort

and help the weak-hearted, and to make the timid or the stricken brave. In a few minutes we shall ask our living Lord—

"That it may please Thee to give faith and courage to those who are in anxiety and suspense; To comfort and help the mourners, and all who are desolate and distressed.

"Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses."

"Mine angel is with you, and I myself caring for your souls."

## DEPRESSION AND GLOOM.

And if the "peace of God" can and does guard us from unworthy fear, so too it guards us from that vaguer, less definable expression which can easily—to use a common phrase—take the heart out of people at such a time. But—let us put it quite plainly—That simply must not happen. Such an attitude is not only mischievous; it is flatly disloyal to conscience and to God. If it be true, and true it indisputably is, that it was against the clear wish, against the firm and persevering effort, of England that this dread thing, this unutterably wrong thing in the world's life, came about, then it is with clear conscience and with head erect that we go forth and forward and it is ours to let the "peace of God which passeth all understanding" shield us absolutely from lugubriousness and gloom. We are face to face with definite dangers for those whom we love, and quite possibly for ourselves. They are real and urgent. They mark the gravity of these great days. But to be therefore plunged into gloom is to miss the meaning and character of our Christian calling, which was to fit and arm us for such days as these, not less than for times of quiet. There may well lie heavy on our conscience recollections of wasted opportunities and frequent feebleness of grip, and a greed of mere money-getting, and a low standard of manliness and womanliness, in days gone by, which have helped, perhaps, to make the girding of the loins for strenuous times like this a harder task. Lord, we confess to Thee now the prayerless laxity of our days of ease, the selfish complacency of unfruitful lives, the lack of vigour and of sternness in our handling of things impure and cowardly and mean. Our sins have left their mark upon those buried years now gone beyond recall. But we have other thoughts to-day, and in the matter of this stern strife we have entered upon it clean-handed and with conscience void of offence:—

"There are things more to be abhorred

Than warfare and the clash of arms.

The bloody and disastrous sword

Only the mortal body harms,

A broken pledge, a friend betrayed,

Are wrongs that make our souls afraid."

## THE TEMPTATION AT HOME.

Soldiers have said sometimes that the vast horribleness of war presses more heavily upon the heart of those at home than of those who, in the hurly-burly of march and fighting line, have little leisure for more than the duty of the hour. There is another side to that, but it may sometimes be so. Anyhow, every day's evidence shows that, if the temptation comes at all, it is we at home, and not our gallant, our indomitable soldiers and sailors in the battle-line, who are liable to fits of depression and gloom. The England of to-day is, I think, proving herself on the whole to be worthy of her traditions and true to her faith. But gradually, as the tale of death and suffering and bereavement grows and grows in a widening circle, there must inevitably be temptation here and there, not, indeed, to doubt the ultimate issue, but to bend under the burden of the daily sorrow. Not many of us, perhaps, had realized the appalling cost in human, yes, and animal suffering at which alone the cause which we deem righteous can be won. We see it, or some measure of it, now, and it does in good truth need that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" must enter in if we are to be guarded and garrisoned against the gloominess which may, as the months roll on, creep over a good many of us. But the peace is there. Enter in and garrison us it can.

## RIGHTEOUS ANGER AND UN-CHRISTIAN HATE.

Let me name one more peril against which our hearts and minds are, after to-day's prayers, to